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February 2009

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THE START of a new year is as good a time as any to ponder the future of our game. A time to look forwards rather than backwards. A time to consider the good, the bad and the ugly aspects of football.

This month we have handed over a large chunk of the magazine (starting on page 35) to our leading writers and columnists with one instruction: peer into the future (as best you can) and tell us whether you like what you see.

I don't agree with everything our contributors have said, but I will defend to the last their right to say it. Their crystal-ball gazing may serve a useful purpose, or it may not. Either way, it deserves to spark a debate about football's future.

There's always a great danger in traditional sports such as ours that people who advocate change are dismissed as cranks and arrivistes who do not understand the game. But I believe our writers have sufficient stature to ensure a serious and stimulating debate. And I hope that if you disagree with anything that has been written here, you will write to tell us why.

Enjoy the issue.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
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SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER ON PAGE 32

7 stories you need to know about

The way forward...Ramos

1 Schuster out, Ramos in at Real Madrid

Madrid's directors sacked German coach Bernd Schuster after he claimed his side had no chance of beating Barcelona at the Camp Nou. But nobody expected former Sevilla and Tottenham boss Juande Ramos to be brought in as his replacement. More, page 18.

2 From Galactico to geriatrico

Former England captain David Beckham, on loan from Major League Soccer for 10 weeks, provided an injection of glamour into an ageing Milan squad. More, page 28.

He's back...Beckham

3 World Cup bidding wars expected

FIFA announced it will consider simultaneous bids for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. England and Australia have already announced they will bid for 2018. The English Football Association finalised their board and FA chairman David Triesman opted for a hands-on approach, while the Australian government pledged £20million to their federation. Qatar and Russia are expected to join the process, along with joint proposals from Belgium-

England bid...Triesman

Champions...Sao Paulo fans celebrate

Holland-Luxembourg and Spain-Portugal. Others considering throwing their hats into the ring are China, Japan, Mexico, the United States and Canada. A decision to what is likely to be the most fiercely competitive bidding process, is expected in December 2010.

4 Titles decided across Latin America

Boca Juniors won the 23rd championship in Argentina, while Sao Paulo made it three-in-a-row in Brazil's national championship. Titles were also decided in Paraguay, Ecuador, Chile and Mexico. More, pages 22, 26 and 96.

5 Kanoute facing rap for shirt protest

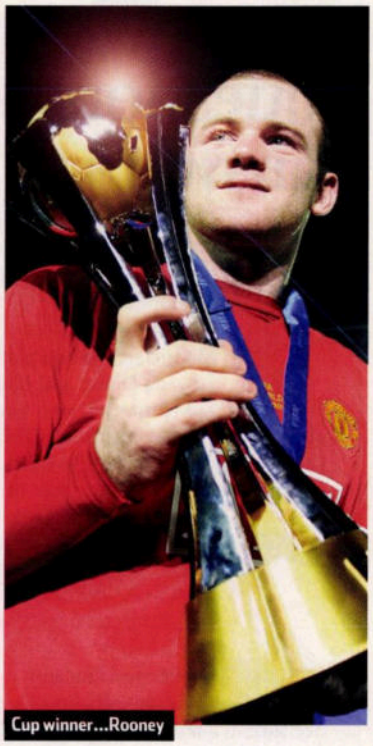
Sevilla striker Freddie Kanoute is facing possible sanctions from FIFA after he revealed a pro-Palestine T-shirt during a Spanish Cup match.

6 South African World Cup official shot dead

Security arrangements for the 2010 World Cup have come under renewed scrutiny after tournament official Jimmy Mohlala was shot dead outside his home in Nelspruit by unknown gunmen wearing balaclavas. Mohlala, a former vice president of the South African Football Association, headed the local council in Nelspruit, which is one of 10 venues for the 2010 finals. He had previously made headlines after exposing alleged corruption in the building of the Nelspruit stadium.

7 Manchester United add the Club World Cup to their trophy cabinet

European champions United beat LDU of Quito 1-0 in Yokohama to win the Club World Cup. But the tournament still lacks credibility as a global force. More, page 84.


Cup winner...Rooney

Getting shirty...Kanoute makes a political statement

7 questions we need answers to

Fall guy...Huntelaar has appeared for Ajax in this season's UEFA Cup

1 Did nobody at Real Madrid read the UEFA regulations?

Madrid signed two players, Lassana Diarra and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, who have already played in this season's UEFA Cup. So only one can play in the Champions League. More, page 18.

2 If his loan spell at Milan is a success, will David Beckham try to get out of his MLS contract with LA Galaxy?

The former England captain faces a potentially huge decision in a few weeks' time. More, page 28.

Decision...Beckham

Defying the odds...Hoffenheim

3 Can Hoffenheim's fairy story continue?

The newly-promoted Bundesliga club ended the first half of the season in pole position, ahead of favourites Bayern Munich on goal difference. More, page 24.

It's a knockout...the Champions League draw

4 What was that about English clubs dominating this year's Champions League?

Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool were handed tough draws (against Internazionale, Juventus and Real Madrid respectively) in the Champions League draw. More, page 103.

Hands off...Moggi

5 Was there ever any chance of Luciano Moggi being jailed for his part in the 2006 Calciopoli scandal?

The former Juventus general manager received a suspended 18-month jail sentence. In the time it took for the Rome court to pass judgment, Juventus have been relegated and promoted back to Serie A and re-entered the Champions League.

6 Does the Australian government's funding of its federation's bid to host the 2018 World Cup count as political interference?

The Australian government is strongly backing the country's campaign to host the World Cup but it could attract action from FIFA, which has suspended other countries where politicians have exerted undue influence on the federation.

Socceroos supporter...Australian PM Kevin Rudd

7 Can Milan and Real Madrid be serious about signing Liverpool's Jermain Pennant?

Rumours in Italy and Spain suggested that the Champions League contenders were contemplating a gamble on one of English football's most frustrating talents. Bizarre.

ESM Team of the Month

European Sports Magazines

DECEMBER 2008

Steven Gerrard
Liverpool
Votes ●●●●●●●
Despite his off-pitch distraction, the Liverpool captain has impressed in his club's increasingly strong challenge for the Premier League title.

Carles Puyol
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●
Captain of the current Spanish league leaders, who confirmed their dominant position with victory over bitter rivals Real Madrid.

Pepe Reina
Liverpool
Votes ●●●
A consistent figure in Liverpool's qualification for the Champions League knockout stages and their rise to the top of the Premiership table.

Giorgio Chiellini
Juventus
Votes ●●●●●
Outstanding at the back for Juventus and scored one of the Old Lady's goals as they beat Milan 4-2 in the battle of Serie A's big beasts.

Maicon
Internazionale
Votes ●●●●●●●
Arguably the best right-back in the world right now, the Brazilian's attacking flair has been crucial to Inter's continued success.

Thierry Henry
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●●
The Frenchman is enjoying his second season in Spain far more than his first, with his form contributing to Barcelona's outstanding attacking football.

Lionel Messi
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●●●●
Cristiano Ronaldo may have garnered all the end-of-year awards but Messi has been the world game's outstanding individual this season.

Xavi
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●●●
In brilliant form for Barcelona, playing a pivotal role in midfield – much like his coach Pep Guardiola did in the 1990s.

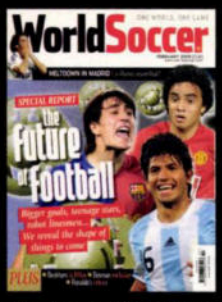
Zlatan Ibrahimovic
Internazionale
Votes ●●●●●●●
His coach Jose Mourinho claims the Swede is the best in the world right now. On current form, the Special One has a case.

Wayne Rooney
Manchester United
Votes ●●●●
Has now put his poor early season form behind him and scored the only goal in Yokohama as United were crowned world club champions.

Amauri
Juventus
Votes ●●●●
The man of the moment in Serie A, his goals have attracted the attention of both Italian and Brazilian national coaches (see Headliners, page 12).

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazines group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with the most votes make the overall team. For details of how the members voted this month, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11



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12 people on the move

Who's gone where

1 LASSANA DIARRA
The France international signed for Real Madrid from Portsmouth in a deal worth around £20million. The former Le Havre, Chelsea and Arsenal midfielder was the first player signed since the arrival of new Real coach Juande Ramos at the Bernabeu.

The Real deal...Madrid new boy Lassana Diarra

2 TIMO HILDEBRAND
Hoffenheim signed the former Stuttgart goalkeeper following his release by Valencia.

Back home...Hildebrand

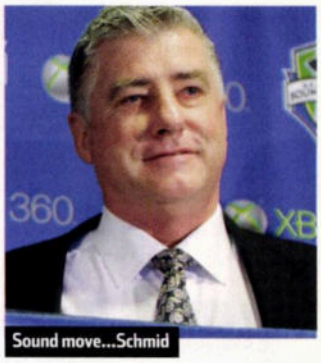
3 EMERSON LEAO
The former Brazil national coach and goalkeeper has returned to Atletico Mineiro for his third stint in charge at the Belo Horizonte club.

4 GIUSEPPE PILLON
The much-travelled coach – whose previous clubs include Genoa, Bari and Chievo – has taken over at Reggina following the sacking of Nevio Orlandi.

5 HUGO SANCHEZ
The former Mexico coach has been appointed coach of Spanish La Liga side Almeria. He replaces Gonzalo Arconada, who was sacked after the team lost to Sporting Gijon.

In charge...Hugo Sanchez has taken over at Almeria

6 SIGI SCHMID
The German-born coach will join Major League Soccer expansion side Seattle Sounders next season after he turned down a new deal with 2008 MLS champions Columbus Crew.



Sound move...Schmid

7 WILLEM VAN HANEGEM
The much-travelled Dutch coach was dismissed one day after announcing he would leave Utrecht at the end of the season. In October the board sacked his entire staff but offered the former international a new contract.

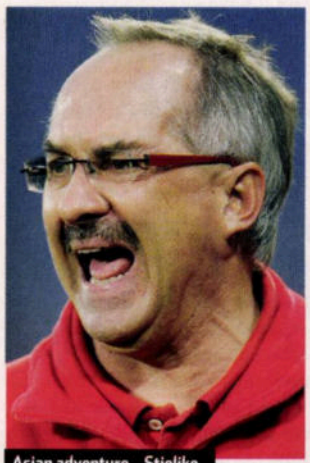
8 YIN TIESHENG
The coach who was in charge of China's Olympic team as they crashed out of the Beijing Games at the group stage has been named national team coach ahead of the qualifiers for the 2011 Asian Cup.

9 CARLOS BIANCHI
The former Boca Juniors coach is returning to the club as general manager. Carlos Ischia will remain as first-team coach at La Bombonera,

Boca boss...Bianchi

with Bianchi in charge of player recruitment and transfers.

10 ULI STIELIKE
The former Germany international has been appointed coach of Qatari club side Al Arabi. The 54-year-old, who guided the Ivory Coast to the 2008 African Nations Cup finals but was unable to take them to Ghana after his son Michael died, was sacked by Swiss club Sion after just 13 matches of this season's league campaign.


Asian adventure...Stielike

No more caps...Kovac

11 NIKO KOVAC
The Croatia captain announced his retirement from international football to make way for younger players in the national team. The 37-year-old Red Bull Salzburg defensive midfielder scored 15 goals in 83 international appearances.

12 REINER HOLLMANN
The German coach has left Egyptian club Zamalek, six months after he was brought in to revive the former African champions' fortunes.

R.I.P.

DRAZAN JERKOVIC
The former Dinamo Zagreb and Yugoslavia forward, who was joint top scorer at the 1962 World Cup in Chile, has died aged 72. Jerkovic was the first manager of the Croatia national team, between 1990 and 1992.

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

REPORTS

WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

IT WAS not a very happy new year for striker Fred, who can't seem to make up his mind about whether to stay with reigning French champions Lyon.

While the Brazilian was dining with his brother-and-agent Rodrigo in a city centre restaurant on New Year's Eve, thieves were breaking into his house to steal jewellery, a very expensive watch and some hi-fi equipment. To add insult to injury, the thieves made off in two of Fred's cars that were parked on the drive, including a £150,000 Lamborghini Gallardo.

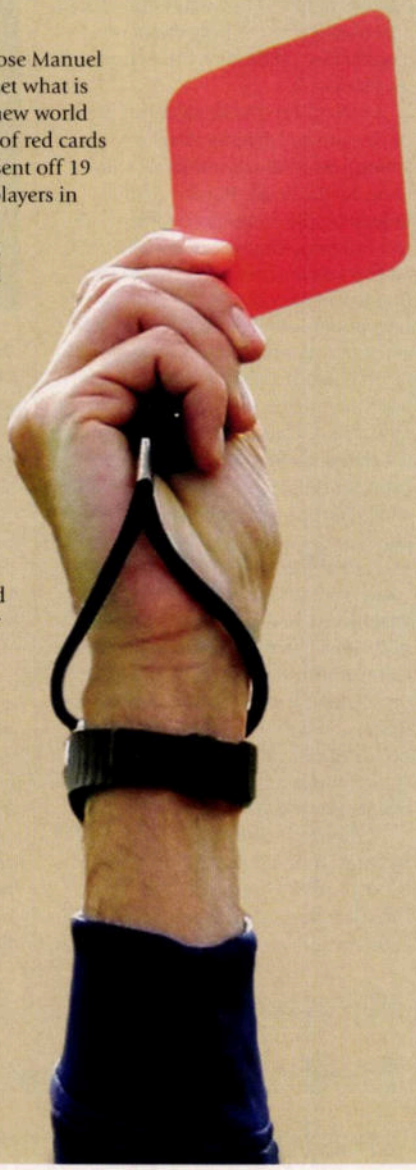
SPANISH referee Jose Manuel Barro Escandon set what is believed to be a new world record for the number of red cards in one game when he sent off 19 (yes, that's nineteen) players in a single match.

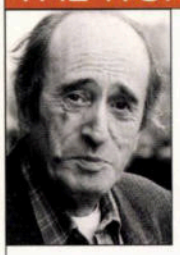
The game, between Recreativo Linense and Saladillo de Algeciras in the Cadiz regional league, was abandoned by Barro Escandon in the 57th minute when a fight broke out between two opposing players and escalated into a mass brawl.

Barro Escandon had already sent one player off before running for the dressing room. Then, in his post-match report, he gave red cards to a further 18 players.

"The players who intervened, and even the spectators, were just trying to see that things didn't get worse," complained Linense coach Sebastian Naranjo.

"I don't know what got into the guy. He is lying in his report."





Brian Glanville

...on the company kept by Steven Gerrard... FA Cup third-round upsets...and Roman Abramovich's future at Chelsea

YOU CAN take the boy out of Huyton, but you can't take Huyton out of the boy. This would appear to be the moral of the squalid early morning goings-on in that Southport disco-cum-restaurant, which ended with Steven Gerrard being held for 20 hours in a police station, charged with several friends with assault and affray, and waiting for the judgement of a magistrates' court at North Sefton on January 23.

I bow to no one in my admiration of Gerrard as a fine footballer, a propulsive midfield influence who plays by the book. But if a man is judged by the company he keeps, we can but hope that the magistrates will be less severe. The fact seems to be that if you turn over a stone in the Liverpool football world, some pretty alarming creatures tend to crawl out.

At Lincoln Crown Court in April last year, an extraordinary letter written by Gerrard's father was read out asking for clemency for a defendant called John Kinsella, who was up before the beak charged with assaulting a security guard and stealing £42,000. The letter from Paul Gerrard told of his family's "utmost respect" for Kinsella, on the grounds he had frightened off a notorious Liverpudlian tough called George Bromley junior, who had been persecuting his son Steven, demanding money with menaces and smashing up his car. Bromley had threatened to shoot Steven in the legs "in a dispute over a girl they had both dated".

It has been rumoured that Bromley was shot in the face. At all events, he is now in jail for drug dealing. As for Kinsella, Gerrard *pere* might well have saved his ink and paper, since Kinsella, sentenced eventually to 14 years, wasn't there to hear the sentence; he had fled from court.

Troubled times... Gerrard is driven home after being held by police investigating a fracas in a bar

Curiouser and curiouser. The more so as it transpires that Gerrard's wife, Alex, a model, was once the girlfriend of a "notorious" Liverpool criminal called Tony Richardson, who abandoned her for another model, called Jennifer Ellison, who just happened to have been the girlfriend of... Steven Gerrard.

Then there is the equally bizarre story of the transfer that never was, when Gerrard was reported to be leaving Liverpool for Chelsea in the summer of 2004 and seemed highly enthusiastic about the move. All of a sudden, it ground to a halt, amid rumours that he had been threatened by local hard nuts if he dared to go.

Personally, I was very glad he didn't leave Anfield since it seemed to me that as that rarity – Jamie Carragher being another – a Liverpudlian star in a Liverpool team, he truly belonged at Anfield. It was good to know that, for whatever reason, an oligarch's billions could not buy him.

Let me say, in passing, that whatever the excesses of its underworld, I have respect and admiration for Liverpool as a city, not least because it has, with its wry, original humour, produced a string of the funniest comedians this country has known – Arthur Askey, Ted Ray, Tommy Handley, Rob Wilton and the peerless, inextinguishable Ken Dodd.

"If you turn over a stone in the Liverpool football world, some pretty alarming creatures tend to crawl out"

OUR old German friend *schadenfreude* – delight in other people's misfortunes – was in evidence again during the third round of the FA Cup. And who, outside their own fans, players and officials, could fail to take some sort of satisfaction from the ordeals of the two richest clubs in the country, Chelsea of the Russian oligarchy, Manchester City of the super billionaires of Abu Dhabi.

True, the two cases were not quite the same. Chelsea were held to a 1-1

draw by little Southend United who, by their manager's own admission, rode their luck at Stamford Bridge and could have been several goals down by the time they scored a late, remarkable equaliser. City, in contrast, were routed, humiliated and disgraced by a Nottingham Forest team aeons away from its glorious days under Brian Clough and bumping along near the bottom of the Championship.

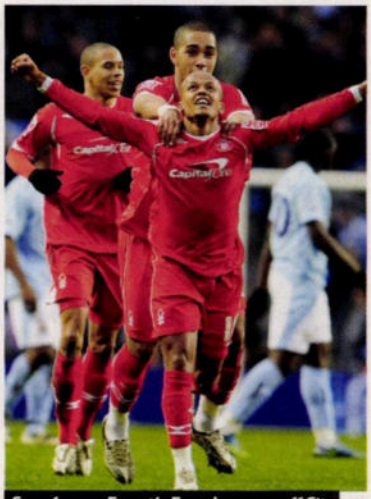
City were without two undoubted stars in Robinho, bought regardless of expense, and the exuberant Stephen Ireland; but did that exonerate them from the shame of a 3-0 defeat, in which their defenders showed supreme ineptitude?

With the opening of the transfer window, the Arabian millions allow Mark Hughes to buy, buy and buy again, presumably and depressingly to buy his way out of trouble.

In the meantime, we can all have a little laugh.

HARD to know what has been going on at Chelsea, where, ludicrously, it has been reported that they may oblige their players to pay for their training ground meals, out at

Puzzling decisions...Scolari


Cup of woe...Forest's Earnshaw sees off City

Cobham. Peter Kenyon, their chief executive, talks about the club getting into the black, but what can that mean when its enormous debt is largely owed to their owner, Roman Abramovich? He may have lost a lot of money in the recent economic turmoil, but surely there is plenty more where that came from. Even if he might have to sell a yacht or two.

Could it be, though, that he is growing disillusioned with his team's oddly drab results this season, especially at home? The much-lauded arrival of Big Phil Scolari has been a sheer anticlimax, and some of his tactical decisions have looked strange. You wonder what made him keep top scorer Nicolas Anelka on the bench throughout the Southend match.

I saw Chelsea against a Jimmy Bullard-less Fulham at Craven Cottage and was far from impressed. Two goals were given away at set pieces by catastrophic defending – yes, I know John Terry wasn't there – while Chelsea's equalising goal was the fruit of an untypically clumsy error by Fulham's keeper, Mark Schwarzer.

I'm not for a moment saying bring back Avram Grant, heaven forbid, but I still think Abramovich made a major mistake in forcing out Jose Mourinho.

FIVE GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Backheel...Muntari

Beaten by Anderson...Quim

1 *Sulley Muntari, Internazionale v Napoli*
Brilliant backheel after sweeping move

2 *Anderson, Vitoria Setubal v Benfica*
Bicycle kick from outside the area

3 *Emre, Fenerbahce v Denizlispor*
Chest and volley from 30 yards

4 *Arjen Robben, Real Madrid v Villarreal*
Beat five defenders and curled shot into top corner

5 *Pedro Lopez, Valladolid v Deportivo*
Lobbed keeper from just inside the halfway line

Cracker...Emre

Dribble...Robben

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Amauri

Juventus striker facing country v country dilemma

ITALY

JUST ABOUT every time Italy coach Marcello Lippi met with reporters towards the end of 2008, one question came up with unfailing regularity. Would he find a place in his side for Juventus' Brazil-born striker Amauri, who is apparently well on the road to becoming a naturalised Italian?

Although Amauri has no Italian ancestry, he could well become Italian this year thanks to the fact that his Brazilian wife, Cynthia, resident in Italy for more than 10 years, has requested Italian citizenship. Mrs Amauri was due to receive her new passport sometime in early January 2009 which, given the lengthy rules and regulations laid down by the Ministry of the Interior, means that her footballer husband could qualify for an Italian passport in June or July.

However, it is always possible that, by the time Amauri is eligible for Italian citizenship, the question could be academic. Before the summer is out, Brazil coach Carlos Dunga may have resolved the dilemma by calling up Amauri himself.

Who knows, perhaps he will even do so for Brazil's prestige clash with Italy at the Emirates Stadium in London on February 10. Speaking to sports daily *Gazzetta Dello Sport* in late December, Dunga gave a not-so-veiled hint: "I'd like to call up Amauri for one of our next friendlies. Mind you, there is a certain hierarchy that has to be respected in the Brazilian team and if he prefers to play for Italy... he's the one who has to decide."

Why all this fuss about a player who, after all, will be 29 in June? The answer is simple. For the last three seasons, Amauri has been one of the most competitive and combative centre-forwards in Serie A . In two seasons with Palermo, between 2006 and 2008, he scored 23 league goals.

Having originally made his name during three seasons at little Chievo, Amauri's big break came last summer when Juve paid £21.4million for him. Having finally climbed to the top of the greasy pole, Amauri then had a little luck when a serious injury to Juve's France ace David Trezeguet meant that coach Claudio Ranieri had little option other than to give the newcomer a sustained chance.

Amauri rewarded Ranieri with 11 Serie A goals prior to the winter break, placing him fourth in the goalscorers' list – one behind Marco Di Vaio (Bologna), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina) and Diego Milito (Genoa), who were all on 12. Such form in front of goal means there are many who feel Lippi should snap him up... if Dunga has not already moved, that is.

As for Amauri himself, he will only offer: "When a call-up [from either Italy or Brazil] comes through, then I'll give my answer – which might even be in the negative."

Mystery upon mystery. Watch this space.

Paddy Agnew

New signings...United boss Sir Alex Ferguson welcomes Ljajic (left) and Tosic to Old Trafford

Hand on heart...Amauri has yet to decide if he wants to play for Italy or Brazil

Zoran Tosic
'Bambi' snapped up by United

SERBIA

BACK IN NOVEMBER, when the Belgrade media reported that Zoran Tosic and Adem Ljajic were moving to Manchester United, Serbian football fans were either stunned or simply dismissed the news as fabricated transfer rumours.

It's not that they didn't expect Partizan star Tosic to move abroad, or that they weren't used to youngsters like Ljajic (17) leaving after just a few appearances for the first team. What was puzzling was the pair's destination.

At first, Partizan's bosses refused to comment or offered a rather unconvincing denial. But when UK newspapers and Manchester United's website reported Tosic had been granted a work permit a week later, it became clear that 'Bambi', as he is nicknamed, was really on his way to Old Trafford.

Any remaining doubters were finally silenced on December 10 when TV pictures showed Tosic and Ljajic boarding a flight to Manchester – United having sent a special jet to collect them.

Tosic, 21, is a left-footed attacking midfielder who joined Partizan in the summer of 2007 from Banat Zrenjanin – where he got his nickname after taking Bambi biscuits to training with him – and was a member of the Serbia side that finished runners-up at that year's Under-21 European Championship. He helped Partizan win the League and Cup last season, and has 12 caps for the full national team although he isn't yet a regular.

This season Tosic has been in great shape, scoring some terrific goals – six in the League, plus one in the Champions League qualifiers and one in the UEFA Cup.

A specialist at set-pieces who can play either on the left wing or anywhere behind the strikers, his strong points are speed, excellent technique and a fierce shot. However, some observers feel that he can hold onto the ball for too long and his size (he's 1.71m and 69kg) means he is helpless in duels against physically stronger opponents.

"It is a fact that my build and style of play are maybe more suitable for some other leagues," agreed Tosic. "But Manchester United is such a big club that it motivates you to fight against opponents and also to fight with yourself to fulfil your ambitions. I am working on increasing my power and on improving my physical abilities. I like the challenge and I am sure that I can adapt."

There was some wrangling between agents over salaries after the clubs had agreed a transfer fee, amid speculation that Partizan were holding out for a deal for both Tosic and Ljajic. But the loose ends were tied up following a visit to Belgrade by United chief scout Jim Lawlor.

Tosic has signed a three-and-half year contract, with United paying Partizan an initial £6.5m. Ljajic has signed a four-and-a-half-year deal for £8.45m, but he will stay with Partizan on loan until January 2010.

Vladimir Novak

Ronaldo
Striker signs controversial deal with Corinthians

BRAZIL

IN BRAZIL HE has long been known as "Ronaldo phenomenon", but in the Rio press he has now been christened "phenomenal traitor" after his shock decision to sign for Corinthians of Sao Paulo.

The 32-year-old striker has consistently talked about his ambition to play for Flamengo of Rio, the club he supports, and where he had been training for four months recovering from his latest knee injury. He had previously said that if he did come back to Brazilian football, Flamengo would be his first option. Had he gone back to Europe the club's fans would probably have been more understanding. But the sudden announcement that he was joining Corinthians left them enraged.

"We're going to make a big flag with a photo of a very fat Ronaldo and a transvestite in a Corinthians shirt," said Jose Carlos Peruano, organiser of a group of Flamengo fans who had been encouraging Ronaldo to stay. "Not to mention the voodoo. Let's hope he breaks his leg and can't play any more." Pictures of Ronaldo were symbolically burned.

Meanwhile in Sao Paulo, Ronaldo declared himself "one more madman joining a band of madmen" in reference to the renowned passion of the Corinthians supporters. It seems that in this deal, though, Ronaldo has used his head much more than his heart.

He justified himself by complaining that Flamengo had not made him a proposal. He was well aware, though, that Flamengo's position was to wait and see if he was going to make a full recovery before putting terms on the table. With no hard offer from Europe, Ronaldo has followed the money and opted for security. He will earn a reported £120,000 per month, part coming from the club and part from sponsors, and according to the Brazilian press he is guaranteed a considerable sum until the end of the year even if he should break down before taking the field.

Why have Corinthians taken this risk? Almost certainly because, with domestic Brazilian football shorn of its stars, having Ronaldo makes the club stand out and creates many marketing opportunities. "Now Corinthians will be globalised," said club president Andres Sanchez. "We will have a visibility that we've never achieved before."

With the club having being promoted back to the first division, it also keeps the momentum going on the way to 2010, Corinthians' centenary. Unlike all their local rivals, Corinthians have never won the Libertadores Cup, which has become their holy grail. Their utopia would be to qualify for the competition in 2009 and then win it in 2010 – with their new star leading the charge.

First, though, he has to regain fitness. He is unlikely to be ready for the start of the Sao Paulo championship on January 21. Instead Corinthians are hoping to organise a friendly against heavyweight international opposition to celebrate their audacious coup.

Tim Vickery

New signing...Ronaldo shows off his Corinthians shirt

Santos Mirasierra
Marseille 'ultra' becomes French cause celebre

FRANCE

THE CASE OF Santos Mirasierra, the Olympique Marseille supporter jailed for violent conduct during his team's Champions League visit to Atletico Madrid in October, has been the Gallic cause celebre of recent weeks, almost causing a diplomatic incident between France and Spain.

Mirasierra, 34, leader of the Ultras, a major OM fan group, was arrested for allegedly injuring a policeman in clashes before the game at the Vicente Calderon stadium and despite loudly protesting his innocence, spent a month in prison before hearing that local prosecutors intended to push for an eight-year sentence.

Inevitably, reaction in Provence was one of outrage. OM president Pape Diouf termed Mirasierra's fate a "sequestration", fans went on Free Santos demos and organised internet petitions, while French MPs urged foreign minister Bernard Kouchner to intervene.

French conspiracy theorists had a field day, many seeing the matter as a Spanish attempt at revenge after UEFA had punished Atletico for racist abuse hurled at Marseille's black players.

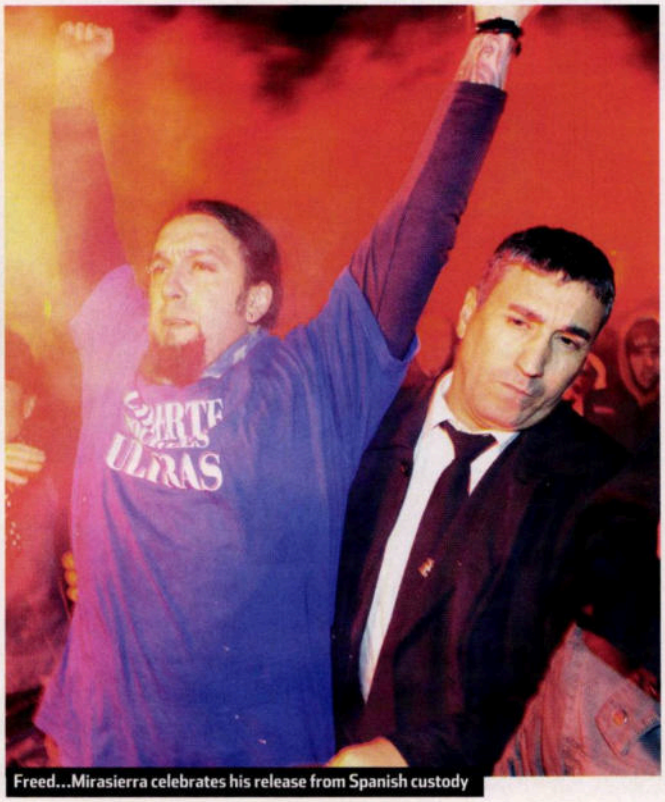
Mirasierra supporters, on the other hand, claimed that, as someone with dual French-Spanish citizenship, he was a convenient scapegoat. French lawyer Gilbert Collard called Mirasierra a victim of "judicial propaganda", adding: "Santos is sport's first political prisoner."

When the case finally went to court early in December, Mirasierra denied throwing the seat which injured a policeman. But a Spanish law enforcer testified seeing the seat attack and his version of events carried the most weight, the final sentence being three-and-a-half years' hard time.

"He should have killed to deserve this verdict," complained Mirasierra's sister, Lucille, to a French radio station. Top Spanish sports daily *Marca* called the verdict "exemplary."

Mirasierra appealed but within days there was a dramatic twist. After 70 days behind bars – mostly his time on remand – he was released on £5,000 bail. Cue an emotional welcoming party outside Estemera jail and even wilder scenes on his return to Marseille.

Nick Bidwell



Freed...Mirasierra celebrates his release from Spanish custody

End of an era...Salas has retired at the age of 33

Marcelo Salas
Farewell to 'El Matador'

CHILE

AS CHILE'S ALL-TIME top scorer (37 goals in 70 internationals), South American Player of the Year in 1997 and a prolific marksman in trophy-winning campaigns for Universidad de Chile, River Plate and Lazio, Marcelo Salas will have a wealth of warm memories to live on following his decision to retire at the age of 33.

The player they called "El Matador" opted to walk away after Universidad, the Santiago club which bookended his dazzling 15-year career, were eliminated by Cobreloa in the quarter-finals of the Chilean championship. Typically, he went down fighting, scoring twice in his team's ultimately academic 3-2 second-leg win.

Few could have foreseen Salas featuring at the highest level for as long as he did. Since leaving Lazio for Juventus in 2001, injuries – particularly to his knees – have dogged him. But an irrepressible competitive spirit has always formed part of his sporting DNA and he underlined it by forcing his way back into Chile's team in the autumn of 2007, two years after announcing his international retirement.

He played in the first four World Cup 2010 qualifiers and made his last appearance for the "Roja" in November last year against Uruguay in Montevideo, bagging both goals in a 2-2 draw.

Bullish, resilient, excellent in the air and packing a stinging left-foot shot, the stocky Salas rates as one of the best Latino strikers of the last two decades and has an automatic spot in the Chilean pantheon of greats. With Ivan Zamorano, he was largely responsible for Chile's qualification for France 98, the country's first World Cup for 16 frustrating years.

"El Matador" scored 11 times en route to the tournament and enhanced his reputation with four more at the finals, including a brace in a 2-2 draw with Italy.

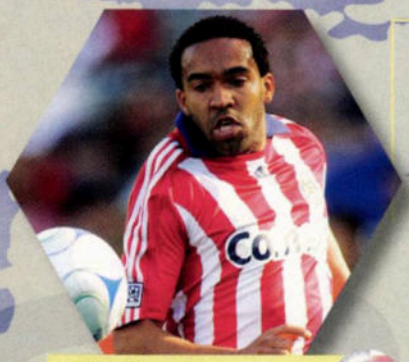
No longer will we see the Salas trademark goal celebration – the bended knee and the index finger of the right hand pointed skywards. He will be missed.

Nick Bidwell

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

PLAYER NATIONALITIES

Countries represented in the top divisions



47

UNITED STATES

Major League Soccer includes players from 29 different Central and South American countries, including one Cuban (Maykel Galindo of Chivas, pictured).

70

ENGLAND

After English, Irish (34) is the most popular nationality in the Premier League, followed by French (33) and Brazilian (20). Some of the lesser countries represented include Cape Verde Islands (Pele, West Brom, pictured), Oman (Ali Al Habsi, Bolton) and Angola (Manucho, Manchester United).

11

BRAZIL

The non-natives in the Brazilian national championship are all South American – with the exception of Dejan Petkovic of Atletico Mineiro (pictured), who is Serbian, and Abubakar of Vasco da Gama, who was born in Nigeria.

54

FRANCE

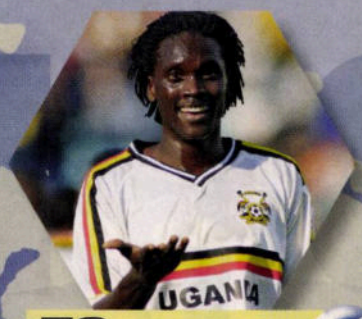
Ligue 1 is home to players from 19 different African countries and 29 Brazilians, including five (Cris, Ederson, Fabio Santos, Juninho, pictured, and Fred) at champions Lyon.

7

ARGENTINA

Those of a different nationality in the Argentinian championship are all from South America, with the exception of Arsenal's Jose Manuel Contreras, from Guatemala. Paraguayans, including international Julio Cesar Caceres of Boca Juniors (pictured), are the most popular foreigners. There is currently only one Brazilian – Jadson Viera of Lanus.

United nations...Dortmund's Neven Subotic and Mohamed Zidan



39

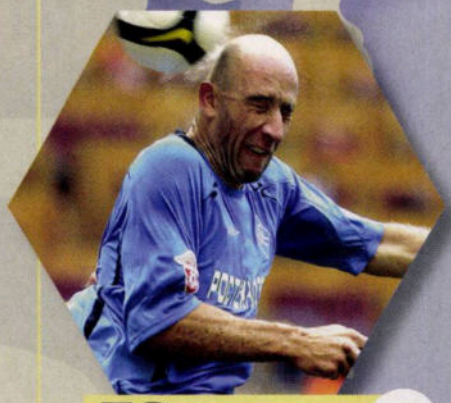
SCOTLAND

There are 26 Englishmen in the Premier League, as well as five Lithuanians and a Ugandan (David Obua of Hearts, pictured).

60

GERMANY

The Bundesliga's non-Germans include a Namibian (Collin Banjamin of Hamburg), a Chinese (Jiayi Shao, Energie Cottbus), a Serb (Neven Subotic, Borussia Dortmund), an Egyptian (Mohamed Zidan, Borussia Dortmund) and an Algerian (Karim Matmour, Borussia Monchengladbach, pictured).



50

RUSSIA

The number of different nationalities in the Russian league include players from 22 former Soviet states and Eastern Bloc countries, as well as one player from North Korea, Choe Myong-Ho of Krylia Sovetov Samara – who also have Czech striker Jan Koller, pictured, on their books.

43

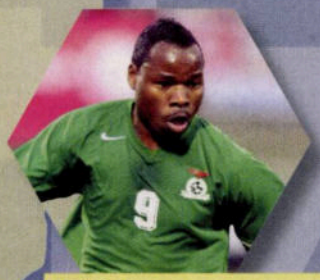
SPAIN

Brazilians and Argentinians (including Atletico Madrid's Sergio Aguero, pictured) are the most common nationalities in La Liga after Spaniards, but there are also players from Iran (Masoud Shojaei of Osasuna), Iceland (Eidur Gudjohnsen of Barcelona) and Israel (Gai Assulin, also of Barcelona).

46

ITALY

Serie A has players from seven different South American countries, including Peru's Juan Vargas at Fiorentina (pictured) and Paraguay's Edgar Barreto at Reggina.



24

SOUTH AFRICA

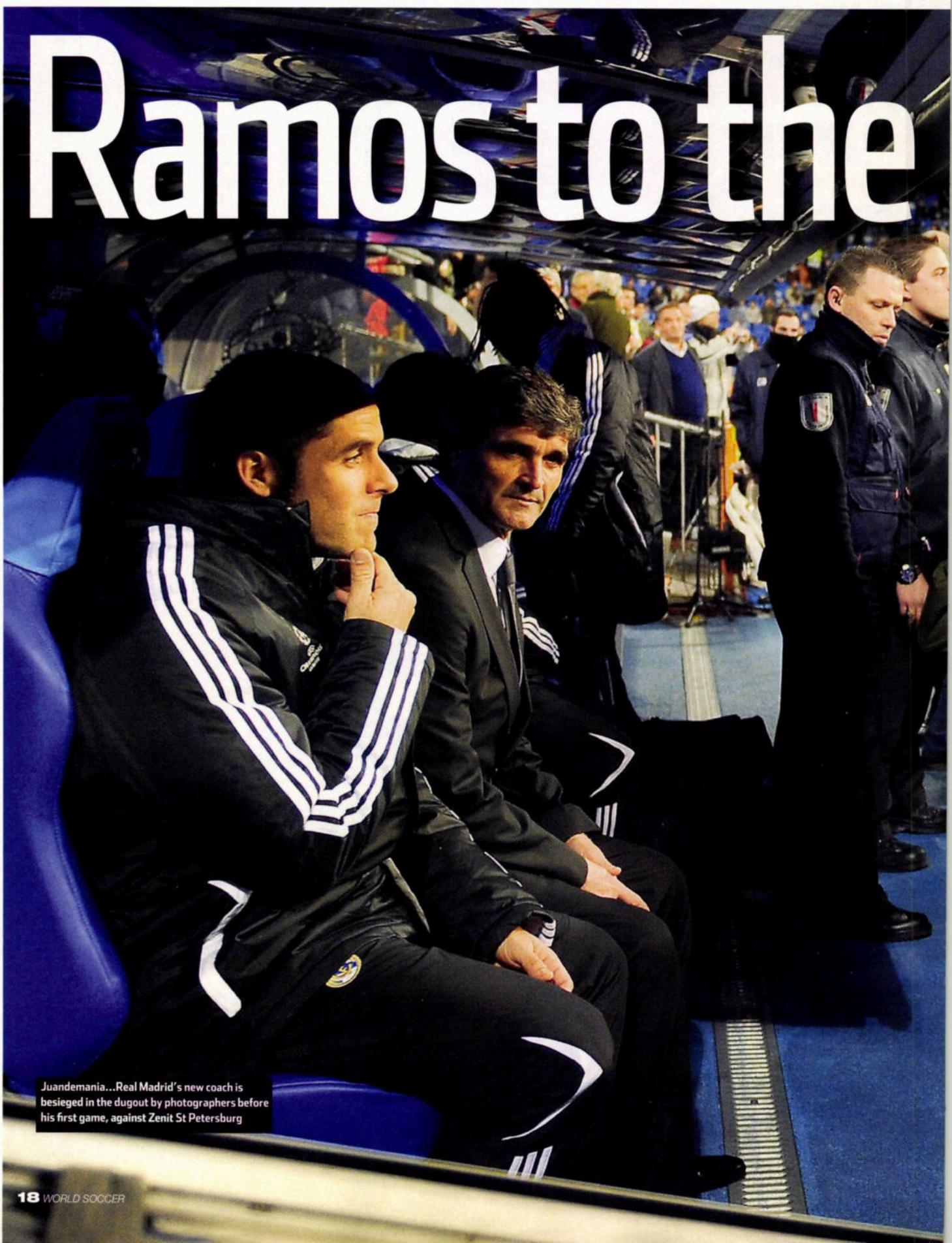
Of the different nationalities in the South African Premier League, all are from other African countries – including the Zambian Collins Mbesuma of Mamelodi Sundowns, pictured – with the exception of nine Brazilians, two Venezuelans and one Chilean.

14

AUSTRALIA

Of the players plying their trade in the A-League, eight are Brazilian – including former international Juninho, pictured, of Sydney.

Ramos to the



Juandemania...Real Madrid's new coach is besieged in the dugout by photographers before his first game, against Zenit St Petersburg

The former Sevilla and Totteham coach, a surprise choice to replace Bernd Schuster at Real Madrid, faces an uphill battle to save the club's season

rescue!

SID LOWE
in Madrid

> "Winning at Camp Nou is impossible, Barcelona are rolling over everyone. All we can do is go there and put in a decent performance"

Schuster seals his fate by writing off Madrid's chances against their bitter rivals

DISPATCHES

BERND SCHUSTER had been preparing his own death warrant for months but he finally signed, sealed and delivered it just before midnight on December 7.

He did so in classic Schuster style too, from the same stage where his most memorable moments as Real Madrid coach had played out: the press room. Barely two days later, pay-off secured, Schuster walked out of Madrid as the former Tottenham manager Juande Ramos walked in. The German's seat was still warm when the man from La Mancha eased into it.

Down and out...Schuster

December 7 was a cold, wet night and Real Madrid had been defeated 4-3 by Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu. It was their third defeat in four league matches, the solitary victory a deeply unconvincing 1-0 home win against relegation candidates Recreativo Huelva. They had recently been knocked out of the Copa del Rey by Second Division B side Real Union de Irun and were not yet assured of their progression in the Champions League having been beaten twice by Juventus. Next up were bitter rivals Barcelona.

With each passing game, Schuster seemed to be withdrawing physically and emotionally deeper into himself. During games he barely offered instructions, hardly moved from the dugout. In fact, he seemed to be trying to wedge himself right into the corner, deep into his jacket – invariably pulled up tight round his face. Any time soon you expected to look over to the bench and see only the jacket left, sitting there empty.

It was as if Schuster had given up. After a reverse at Getafe, he had declared: "This defeat doesn't hurt because at no stage did I think we could win the game." Now he went a step further. An uneventful press conference suddenly turned when Schuster was asked if it was now "obligatory" to beat Barcelona at the Camp Nou.

"I am," he said, "less worried about that game than any other. Winning at the Camp Nou is impossible. Barcelona are rolling over everyone. It's impossible to beat them. It's their year. The state we're in, all we can do is go there and put in a decent performance. We can't ask for

"For any coach, working at Madrid is a dream. Once I was asked, I was never going to say no" – *Juande Ramos*

New spirit...Royston Drenthe's whole-hearted effort catches Daniel Alves off guard as Madrid, against all the odds, come so close to beating Barcelona

more. We can't fool ourselves. We have to open our eyes." Mouths fell open. Schuster had just written off the league after 14 games. He had declared it impossible to beat Barcelona. He had, in short, fallen on his sword.

No way out

For any coach to throw in the towel is bad enough, for the coach of Real Madrid to do so was worse still and an insult to the 100-year history of the game's greatest club. That, at least, was how Madrid saw it. Sporting director Predrag Mijatovic had given Schuster a desperately unconvincing vote of confidence just two weeks previously; now, there was no way out. Even president Ramon Calderon, who had backed Schuster against those board members wanting him sacked sooner, now relented.

On the Tuesday morning, Schuster turned up at the Bernabeu to conclude negotiations over the termination of his contract. At the same time, Ramos was in another room being offered a six-month deal.

Mijatovic sat before the press in the same room Schuster had "graced" less than 48 hours earlier and announced the sacking. "And now," he said, with a hint of melodrama, "I'd like to introduce our new coach." A door opened and Ramos entered stage left. You almost expected a puff of smoke. Just six weeks after being slung out at Spurs, Ramos had been reborn at Real and the first question was inevitable: can Madrid win at the Camp Nou? "Rest assured," he replied, "we can win every game, I don't care if it is at the Camp Nou."

Ramos added: "For any coach, working at Madrid is a dream and once I was asked, I was never going to say no. We reached an agreement immediately. I was surprised how quickly it all happened."

So was everyone else. His first job was to take training – and another press conference – that very evening. The

following day, there was another press conference following his first game in charge: a Champions League win over Zenit St Petersburg. Three days later, Madrid lost at the Camp Nou, just as Schuster predicted they would. And yet Ramos' defeat was met as a success, the sports daily *AS* emblazoning its cover with the triumphant title: "Madrid are back."

It was an exaggeration but an understandable one. *Madridistas* were keen to grasp any signs of hope and there were some: for 83 minutes, an aggressive, well-organised, deeply defensive Madrid had held out. And, for all that Barcelona dominated, if Royston Drenthe had put away his one-on-one with Barca keeper Victor Valdes, Madrid could perhaps have won the match. At least there were signs of a recovery, signs of a system.

"It is a shame to lose so late," Ramos said. It was the fourth time he had addressed the media in five days; he had held more press conferences than training sessions – an early indication of the special pressures of coaching Madrid.

Pressure too great

It was an indication, too, of why Schuster had not survived longer. Unhappy even when he was happy, Schuster had never enjoyed being Madrid manager. The pressure was simply too great and his failure to handle it had been costly – more so than any footballing failure. He had, after all, won the league with a record points total. But at a club where image is all, a huge line of tense press conferences in which he picked a thousand fights sentenced him. It was appropriate somehow that it should be a remark more than a result that saw him lose his job.

Schuster is notoriously prickly and his relationship with the club had been fraught, too. He used the media to complain that no one listened to him when it came to transfers, moaning he did not have the squad he wanted. He had fallen out with Mijatovic and become distant with the squad – especially captain and kingmaker Raul. He seemed to have no system, switching between 4-3-3, 4-2-3-1 and 4-4-2; he could only listen as Sergio Ramos publicly complained he had to cover an entire wing on his own. The mistakes racked up.

But it was not Schuster's fault – or at least not only his fault – that the atmosphere was so tense, that the president is constantly under pressure with accusations flying and opposition figures manoeuvring into position for an all-out attack. Nor was it his fault that Ruud Van Nistelrooy, Mahamadou Diarra, Pepe and Arjen Robben spent so long out injured. And it certainly was not his fault that Cristiano Ronaldo didn't sign and that Robinho departed.

Which is why his sacking will remedy some of Madrid's ills, and in particularly spark hopes for the Champions League, but not necessarily solve all the club's problems. Under Ramos, Madrid have beaten Valencia and Villarreal, two direct rivals for second place. They have a system. They have a new-found work ethic. They are competitive. Iker Casillas is re-focused, a miracle worker once more. And key players are coming back from injury – none more importantly than Robben, who has been in sparkling form.

The club have recognised the imbalance in the squad and begun the search for new players to counter that, too. Where they ignored Schuster, they have listened to Ramos' advice and started looking for a right-sided midfielder. They have signed Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Lassana Diarra, the lad who asked the fans to call him "Lass".

But if ever there was an illustration that life is not as rosy as it seems, if ever there was a graphic portrayal of the chaos that runs through the club, it was the signing of Lass and Klaas. The man whose job it was to know UEFA's regulations clearly did not know them; it took an article in the newspaper *Marca* for Madrid to realise just what a hideous error they had made.

Both players had already represented their previous clubs in this season's UEFA Cup. UEFA allows a club to make three registration changes ahead of the Champions League knockout stages, but only one of these three players is allowed to have previously played in the UEFA Cup for another team in the same season.

Real Madrid have bought two players whose mission it is to win the Champions League. But never mind winning it, only one of the two will even be allowed to play in it.

"It took an article in *Marca* for Madrid to realise their mistake over new signings"

Real problem...Huntelaar's participation in the Champions League is in question

DISPATCHES

Victory in defeat...Claudio Morel Rodriguez celebrates Boca's success in the opening championship, despite their 1-0 loss against Tigre

The Buenos Aires side won the opening championship after a triangular title play-off

No 23 for Boca

ERIC WEIL
in Buenos Aires

THE 2008-09 opening championship finished with three teams tied at the top – Boca Juniors, San Lorenzo and Tigre – for the first time since 1968. With goal difference not counting, the trio had to play off in a three-way title decider.

All three had been level with one league match to play, while Lanus – who critics thought played the best football under 27-year-old Luis Zubeldia, the youngest coach – also had a chance, sitting two points behind.

It is against Argentinian FA rules for one team to give another financial incentives to beat a third side, but there were plenty of rumours suggesting such goings-on before the final round of games. One offer was reportedly made to San Lorenzo's rivals, Argentinos Juniors, through the latter's hooligan gang, who obviously would have kept some of the cash. However, it all amounted to nothing in the end as all four title chasers won.

Boca Juniors eventually won the play-off, but only by the slightest of margins. The three teams finished the triangular tournament with three points each, but Boca had the better goal difference.

Having won 3-1 against San Lorenzo – who had beaten Tigre 2-1 – Boca won their 23rd professional title, despite losing their second play-off game 1-0 to Tigre. If the margin of defeat had been any greater, outsiders Tigre would have claimed the title.

Boca had taken a risk by selling a number of experienced reserves and buying no replacements, but the young players from their junior ranks – such as goalkeeper Javier Garcia (aged 21), defender Juan Forlin (20), midfielder Cristian Chaves (22), and strikers Pablo Mouche (21), Ricardo Noir (21) and Lucas Viatri (21) – delivered the goods when injuries took their toll.

Yet ultimately it was the wise old heads of midfielders Sebastian Battaglia (28) and Juan Roman Riquelme (30) who took Boca to yet another title.

Riquelme, gaining his fifth yellow card in the victory over San Lorenzo, was suspended for the final play-off game against Tigre, but by then he had already played 55 matches in 2008, including league, cup, Olympics and internationals. Some said he was too tired to lift a leg, but they must have been watching another game as he scored and made vital goals for his club and the national side. There is no other player in Argentinian football today who is as decisive as Riquelme is for his team.

How did modest Tigre end up fighting the big clubs for the title? Having made comparatively few changes since returning to the top division two years ago, their story should be a lesson to others who continually change their line-ups.

And how come River Plate, champions of the 2007-08 season's closing championship, finished bottom of the opening championship just half a year later? While that may seem a mystery, it clearly wasn't.

In winning their title, River hardly ever gave a good performance, while on many occasions their international goalkeeper Juan Pablo Carrizo (now in Italy with Lazio) saved the day. Against coach Diego Simeone's wishes they let goalscorer Sebastian Abreu join Beitar Jerusalem in Israel, and although he came back during the tournament, the transfer register was closed and he could only play in international cup games.

Meanwhile, new signings did not hit it off – a persistent criticism of River, who have been buying badly for some time – while many other players lost form. Players also said they never understood Simeone's tactics and former midfield hero Norberto Alonso always complained the team tried to play too fast. Yet when Simeone left and junior team coach Gabriel Rodriguez took over for the remainder of the year and slowed things down, there was no improvement.

However, River will play in this year's Libertadores Cup as 2008 closing champions, together with Lanus (2007 opening champions), new champions Boca Juniors, and San Lorenzo and Estudiantes de La Plata (the two next-best teams, based on points gained in the 2007-08 season's two tournaments and this season's opening championship).

Last instalments

Elsewhere, Racing Club ended a decade of administration and paid the last instalments of their bankruptcy in December, after which they immediately held elections for a new committee to return the club to its members.

Argentina's top referee Hector Baldassi just failed to beat his own record by one when handing out 16 yellow cards (plus two reds) in the Boca Juniors v San Lorenzo play-off. With bitter complaints all season about refereeing mistakes – which have decided vital matches and, ultimately, the championship – there is an urgent need for improved officiating. There have been calls for two referees on the pitch, extra officials behind the goal lines and even "video referees".

One final thought. The title play-offs were played in half-empty stadiums – a fitting end to a year which again showed the authorities to be totally lacking when dealing with security problems. Visiting fans were not allowed into stadiums (apart from in the top division) and stadium capacities were drastically reduced in the title play-off games to keep opposing fans apart, even though there were almost 1,000 police at each game.

Yet, sadly, the year still produced another half-dozen football-related deaths amid ongoing battles between hooligans, mostly linked to leadership infighting.●

"Ultimately it was the wise old heads of Battaglia and Riquelme who took Boca to yet another title"

DISPATCHES

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Top of the table clash... Bayern keeper Michael Rensing tangles with Hoffenheim's Bosnian midfielder Sejad Salihovic

The incredible Hoffenheim story continued as the newly-promoted side went into the Bundesliga winter break as league leaders

Rising stars

NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

AS ASCENTS TO the footballing summit go, that of 1899 Hoffenheim takes some beating, more state-of-the-art cable car than rope and crampons. A year ago the club based in a micro-conurbation in the south-west of Germany were mid-table in the Second Division, eight points off a promotion slot. Twelve months later, Hoffenheim top the Bundesliga at the winter break, albeit only on goal difference from Bayern Munich.

Can Hoffenheim repeat the feat of the Kaiserslautern class of 1997-98, the last newly-promoted team to win the Bundesliga? It's far from impossible. They have the firepower – 2.47 goals per game – fearlessness, decent squad depth, a canny coach in Ralf Rangnick and last, but by no means least, the financial clout of backer Dietmar Hopp, the computer billionaire whose deep pockets were again put to use with the recent acquisition of German international keeper Timo Hildebrand from Valencia.

The Hoffenheim fairy tale does not have universal appeal. Many German fans are creatures of tradition and see 1899 – who almost two decades ago were in the eighth tier – as a synthetic creation of a sugar daddy. However 1899 certainly enjoy greater respect these days. Their status as title rivals to Bayern, the team the rest of the land love to hate, automatically makes them more sympathetic. So does the youthful enthusiasm of a side with an average of 22.6 years and an adventurous attacking style.

An excellent pressing game means they are never on the back foot for long, and once in possession they go straight for the jugular. The credo here is to get forward as quickly and as often as possible. Short, staccato forward passes and lightning off-the-ball movement lay the foundations. The brilliant finishing ability of front-line trident Vedad Ibisevic – currently the league's top scorer with 18 goals – Demba Ba and Shinedu Obasi is the glorious pay-off.

Hoffenheim played with their usual panache and total lack of inferiority complex in the big match of the autumn championship, away to Bayern in December. Rangnick's side were easily the more technically assured team and dominated for long spells, yet still lost 2-1, Luca Toni firing home an injury-time winner after Hoffenheim left-back Andreas Ibertsberger inadvertently diverted the ball into his path with a lunging tackle.

Hungry Hoffenheim

It can be a cruel game. Bayern's star midfielder Franck Ribery admitted as much: "Hoffenheim gave us more problems than any other team this season. I take my hat off to them. They play the ball around superbly and are obviously very hungry."

Despite going home pointless from the Allianz Arena, Hoffenheim at least have the far from insignificant consolation that they have the mighty Bayern rattled. So much so that the latter have already begun to verbally snipe at the small-town pretenders, hoping to unsettle the upstarts with the sort of psychological warfare they are simply not used to. Bayern vice-president Karl Heinz Rummenigge provocatively asked where the top-flight new boys had been hiding themselves for most of their 100-year existence, while always abrasive general manager Uli Hoeness dug out the megaphone for a series of controversial comments and put-downs.

"Despite the global economic crisis, Herr Hopp still has a few euros left," sneered Hoeness. "We have to take him and his club seriously. We're up against a billionaire. Their players are paid a lot more than we think."

Bayern may feel that the six-week winter break has fallen at just the wrong time. Following a decidedly shaky start to the campaign, a period in which new coach Jurgen Klinsmann unsuccessfully experimented with a 3-5-2 system and his team plumbed the depths with a 5-2 loss at home to Werder Bremen, they suddenly regained their touch, finishing the year with an 11-match unbeaten run.

The decision to go back to a 4-4-2 set-up has helped, as have the goals of Toni and strike partner Miroslav Klose, and the often unsung midfield play of the Brazilian Ze Roberto. What really has done the trick, though, is the return to full fitness of Ribery after he missed the early part of the campaign with an ankle ligament injury. Without the little French maestro, Bayern are just not the same team, bereft of ideas, creativity and changes of tempo.

A mere two points behind the leaders are Hertha Berlin and Hamburg, the former very much a surprise participant in the title race. Tenth in each of the two previous seasons, Hertha's penny-pinching transfer budget and lack of star quality in the ranks appeared to rule out optimism. Full marks then to Swiss boss Lucien Favre for making them a competitive force.

Defensively Hertha are an exceedingly strong unit – only 20 goals conceded so far – and their hunches have paid off spectacularly in the loan market, with clever Brazilian midfielder Cicero (ex-Fluminense) and rumbustious Ukraine attacker Andrii Voronin, on secondment from Liverpool, much to the fore.

When Dutch playmaker deluxe Rafael Van der Vaart strode off into the Real Madrid sunset last summer, many predicted a prompt downturn for Hamburg and new coach Martin Jol. Not so. Jol has instilled greater tactical flexibility and has his charges fighting like tigers every week. No, they are not the most attractive to watch, but they have a habit of coming through when the pressure is on, with Croat attacker Mladen Petric often the matchwinner.

Honourable mentions must also go to Bayer Leverkusen, a young, vibrant team built to attack if not to shut up shop, and Borussia Dortmund, who have improved by leaps and bounds under charismatic new coach Jurgen Klopp.

The awards for underachievement belong to Schalke and Bremen, who find themselves in the unfamiliar league position of seventh and eight respectively.

For the relegation spots, Gladbach, Bochum, Cottbus, Karlsruhe and Bielefeld seem the most in peril. What would they give for a Dietmar Hopp?●

"We're up against a billionaire. Their players are paid a lot more than we think"

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeness takes aim at surprise Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim and their wealthy backer Dietmar Hopp

DISPATCHES

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Three in a row...Sao Paulo captain Rogerio Ceni lifts the championship trophy for the third consecutive year

The defending champions won their third consecutive national title – but only on the final day of the season

Sao Paulo again

TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

THIS TIME THEY had to wait until the last day of the season to be crowned, but there is no doubt as to which club is the leading force in Brazilian football. Sao Paulo won a record third consecutive national championship and took their tally to six – more than any other club – since the competition began in 1971.

This latest triumph was defined in the home straight. Sao Paulo trailed Gremio by 11 points around the half-way stage but finished three points in front after going unbeaten through the final 18 games, including 10 wins in the last 12.

Coach Muricy Ramalho had appeared under pressure earlier this year when his team lost the Sao Paulo state championship and were knocked out of the Copa Libertadores in the quarter-finals. But, characteristically, there was no panic at the club. Sao Paulo kept faith with the man who had taken them to the previous two titles, and were duly rewarded.

Populist playing to the gallery has never been Sao Paulo's style. Looking to explain their sustained success, many point to the excellence of their planning. The club insist that it goes deeper. It is a question of ideology.

The directors see their mission as twofold – to win titles, and protect and improve the club's assets. Neither objective is more important than the other. So the club look to improve revenue in order to compete for titles, but do not chase titles with money they don't have. Sao Paulo are always thinking long term.

In the 1960s the club was willing to sacrifice its chances of winning titles while resources were ploughed into building their giant Morumbi stadium, and the 1994 to 2004 period was relatively lean as the club gave priority to investing in its structure. Now its medical facilities are world famous – European-based Brazilians frequently choose to recover from injury at Sao Paulo – and the club's youth development work is also widely admired.

But only three of the title-winning first team have come up through the ranks. Talismanic captain and goalscoring goalkeeper Rogerio Ceni is now 36 and has been with the club since the early 1990s. The other two were the youngest members of the side: talented midfielder Hernanes, 23 and surely Europe-bound, and alongside him 22-year-old Jean, the find of the campaign.

The club aims to produce and sell potentially outstanding players – the likes of Kaka, Julio Baptista and Breno – in order to maintain a squad of good ones. "We take ordinary players," says director Marco Aurelio Cunha, "and with the fantastic structure we have we transform them into good and very good ones."

The 2008 model Sao Paulo are an experienced side – average age over 27 – with a number of players who have come back after spells abroad. There is a growing perception of the usefulness of players in the 27-30 age bracket, those who have returned from the Far East or after not quite making the grade in Europe, and whose commitment to the cause may be greater.

Jorge Wagner, 30, is an obvious example. Perhaps he is a bit short on physical dynamism, and spells in Russia and Spain were not a success. But his left foot is a powerful weapon, especially from set pieces, and no one in the championship contributed more assists.

Top scorer Borges, 28, a lithe striker whose finishing prowess was complemented by an ability to hold the ball up, was brought back from Japan. The other leading marksman was Hugo, also 28, with previous spells in Mexico, Japan and Portugal, a left-footed midfielder proficient at breaking into the box.

Pragmatic model

Sao Paulo's is a pragmatic model from a pragmatic club – which unsurprisingly produces pragmatic football. As 1970 great Tostao wrote recently, the defining characteristics of Sao Paulo are "marking, physical strength, power in the air and making few mistakes". They usually play with three big centre-backs – of whom Miranda was especially impressive, this season – and Ramalho is honest enough to admit that his team has limitations.

But he can count on one player with few limitations, Hernanes, whose all-round excellence was recognised when he was voted player of the championship. This is indicative of one of the most positive aspects of the season – the re-emergence of central midfielders with ability on the ball, a tradition that Brazilian football has neglected in recent years in the search for defensive solidity.

Gremio's second place was an outstanding achievement by Celso Roth's workmanlike young side who were not seen as contenders at the start of the season. The fight for third and fourth place – with much-coveted qualification for the Libertadores – also went to the last day. Cruzeiro, stylish but wayward, pipped Palmeiras, who lost their final match at home to Botafogo, but benefited because direct rivals Flamengo imploded at the end of the campaign.

Flamengo fans still had something to celebrate – the relegation of their great Rio rivals, Vasco da Gama. Over recent years it has become traditional for one big club to go down and now, along with Ipatinga, Portuguesa and Figueirense, it is the turn of four-times champions Vasco.

In truth Vasco have been a cheaply assembled mend-and-make-do side for the last few years, and also went through political turmoil with the messy replacement of long-standing controversial president Eurico Miranda.

With the exception of Bahia, all the major clubs to have been relegated recently have bounced straight back, as was the case this year with Corinthians, runaway winners of the second division. The absence from the top flight of the country's second most popular team was clearly felt – average crowds were down around 500 to 16,712.

Even so, this shows the broad acceptance by the fans of the league format. Critics of the league format used to complain that it robbed the end of the season of drama. Such arguments have been undermined by the decisive last day of the 2008 campaign, with a vale of tears at Vasco while Sao Paulo were all smiles.●

> "Sao Paulo's is a pragmatic model from a pragmatic club which unsurprisingly produces pragmatic football"

DISPATCHES

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Hello again...Beckham's back in European football

David Beckham seems tailor-made for Milan – on and off the pitch

Catwalk king

PADDY AGNEW
in Milan

THE MILAN "Winter Collection" went on show in late December. "He" wore Dolce & Gabbana, while "she" wore a little electric blue cocktail dress of her own design complete with Chanel gloves and handbag. Yes, folks, David and Victoria Beckham finally arrived in Milan and, as we might have expected, the show got not so much on the road as on the catwalk.

In theory, Beckham has come to play for Milan on loan from his USA MLS team, Los Angeles Galaxy, for a 10-week period through to March 8. In practice, as evidenced by the huge media and fan interest generated by his presence at the club's winter training camp in Dubai, Beckham and Milan seem headed for a mutually beneficial arrangement.

While he gets the top-level football he needs to keep fit and earn a place in the England squad for February's friendly with Spain, Milan – with Gennaro Gattuso out for the rest of the season and Andrea Pirlo currently coming back from injury – get a much-needed touch of class and experience in midfield.

As always with Beckham, however, football considerations tend to take second place. Even as the former Manchester United and Real Madrid star was changing into a D&G club suit for his official presentation to the Italian media at the San Siro, lawyers were still fine-tuning the details of his new Milan contract.

Beckham, who already has a £3.75million annual contract with Galaxy, will earn a little extra pocket money with Milan, collecting a £91,000 monthly cheque as well as 50 per cent of the revenue generated by sales of his No32 Milan shirt and other gadgets. In the meantime, he and the missus get to eat in some pretty swanky Milanese restaurants and stay in some very comfortable hotels. On the December weekend they came to town, the Beckhams stopped in the Visconti suite at the Four Seasons Hotel where the asking price for one night is £7,220.

The curious thing is that, despite all the hype and grotesque excess, and notwithstanding the vamp-like presence of his ex-pop star wife, Victoria, sitting in the front row, Beckham still manages to come across as an ordinary, football-loving guy. When he finally met the Italian press, he gave a foot-perfect performance that ranged from the polite to the elegant to the downright enthusiastic.

For a start, he opened up his press conference with a few words in Italian. It wasn't exactly fluent, but it was a much appreciated gesture as he repeated time and again how glad he was to have finally got the chance to play for one of the world's "greatest football clubs". He even indulged in a little poetic licence by saying it had always been his dream to play for Milan.

Like the good professional that he is, Beckham also said he did not expect to get straight into the team and he would have to earn his place like anyone else. Between now and early March, he has 10 Serie A games and two UEFA Cup ties in which to make his mark.

With his winning smile, his good looks and his elegant manners, Beckham appears to be purpose-designed for Milan. Even before the team had returned from Dubai for the Serie A restart, Italian critics were getting excited about a "get-out" clause in Beckham's Galaxy contract that would allow the Englishman to become a free agent at the end of 2009, even though Beckham insists he will honour his contract with Galaxy.

However, the tantalising consideration remains. Namely, if he does well in Italy, will it be merely a 10-week stay back in top flight football? Watch this space.

Triumphant night

If Beckham represented the good news for Milan this Christmas, then Juventus have to be classified as the bad news. When the two Serie A giants met at the Olympic Stadium in Turin in mid-December it proved to be a triumphant night for the Old Lady, who ran out an emphatic 4-2 winner.

Not for the first time this season, Juventus looked like a seriously hard-working, battling squad in which the enthusiasm and energy of youngsters like Claudio Marchisio and Paolo De Ceglie, both 22-year-old midfielders, is flanked by the craft and guile of "old-timers" Pavel Nedved and Alessandro Del Piero. Add to that the work rate and power of Brazilian striker Amauri and you have a genuinely competitive unit.

At the end of a truly splendid game, full of rich and inventive football, we were left with a number of key impressions. For a start, when Claudio Ranieri returns to his old hunting ground of Stamford Bridge for the Champions League clash with Chelsea, he and his men are unlikely to be pushovers. Outrageously talented, champagne footballers they may not be, but Ranieri's Juventus are certainly a very solid lot.

As for Milan, the outstanding impression in Turin was that, Paolo Maldini apart, their defence is far from watertight. Not for nothing were Milan busy looking for a new defender in the January transfer window.

And what about their Milanese cousins, Inter? The reigning champions ended the year in a familiar spot: out in front, six points clear of Juventus and nine ahead of Milan. Intriguingly, however, Inter are headed for a massive showdown at Old Trafford where their Champions League clash with the reigning world and European club champions, Manchester United, will tell us much about the work done by the "Special One", coach Jose Mourinho.

It is no secret that Mourinho has been hired by Inter to win the Champions League, given that the club has picked up the last three Serie A titles. Yet, in losing their last two Group games, to Panathinaikos and Werder Bremen, Inter looked anything but potential Champions League winners.

Mourinho had called for a tough opponent for the second round and he got one. One wonders if the Portuguese coach shares the enthusiasm of his owner, petrol millionaire Massimo Moratti, who declared: "This is the most difficult tie we could have drawn but we can win it."●

"With his winning smile, his good looks and his elegant manners, Beckham appears to be purpose-designed for Milan"

DISPATCHES

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Production director...Wenger has brought through the best crop of youngsters anyone can remember

Tales of doom and gloom at Arsenal are a little premature

Crisis? What crisis?

JIM HOLDEN
in London

THE BANNER HEADLINES have brooked no doubt: "Arsenal trouble", "Arsenal crisis", "Arsenal horror". You have to take a moment to step back and reflect that the Gunners entered the hectic English holiday programme just a couple of wins behind the Premier League leaders and have progressed to the knockout stages of the Champions League, where a very winnable tie against Roma awaits.

As the club's long-serving and hugely admired manager Arsene Wenger reflects with his dry wit: "Every defeat is a crisis at Arsenal."

It would be foolish, of course, to suggest that the season has run as smoothly as Wenger would have liked. Five defeats in the Premier League – some against lowly opposition such as Stoke City and Hull City – have left them a little off the pace, and injuries to Theo Walcott and Cesc Fabregas have done little to help an already stretched squad. The lack of a tall, commanding central defender and an international-class holding midfielder have been unusual errors of judgement by Wenger that will surely be rectified by the purchase of new players in the January transfer window.

Sceptics also had a fine time of it when captain William Gallas revealed criticism of unnamed Arsenal team-mates in his autobiography and a frank magazine interview, the latter of which the French defender later claimed was made off the record. Wenger was disturbed enough to remove the captaincy from Gallas and hand it on to Fabregas, a move that many felt he should have made the previous summer.

Perhaps for the first time the judgement of Wenger was being openly questioned by many Arsenal supporters, and on the puerile radio phone-ins there were even noisy calls for the club to do the unthinkable and sack the manager who has brought them a cascade of trophies and created the most stylish football in Europe.

It was at this precise moment that the mood about the team changed. Arsenal beat Manchester United 2-1 at home in a thrilling contest. A couple of weeks later they won 2-1 at Chelsea. These results, and performances, proved that if the team are sailing in choppy waters, there is still the prospect of glory on the horizon, not least because the club has the best crop of youngsters anyone can remember.

There have only been glimpses so far of the prodigious talent of 17-year-old English midfielder Jack Wilshere, 18-year-old Welshman Aaron Ramsey, 18-year-old Spaniard Fran Merida and the 19-year-old Mexican striker Carlos Vela, among others. But the aficionados of football are purring about these kids, and Wenger's ability to develop these and many more is why every major club in Europe would sign him up if Arsenal were stupid enough to dismiss him.

Of all the headlines, the one with the most resonance declared: "Real Madrid want Wenger."

At a time when all of football is beginning to suffer from the effects of global financial turbulence, the ability of Wenger to create brilliant players and a stylish team without spending vast sums will be ever more admired.

The contrast between the good housekeeping of Arsenal and the massive levels of debt that fund the operations of Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United has been stark in the past few seasons. Chelsea would be extinct instantly if owner Roman Abramovich called in the £700million of "soft" loans that have paid for their players. Liverpool and United could both be in difficulty if the repayments on their debt burden became more onerous.

Boardroom politics

Curiously, the greatest threat to Arsenal's stability and future has prompted the fewest headlines. The most significant development at the club this season has been the departure from the board of directors of Lady Nina Bracewell-Smith, whose family have owned a stake in the club since before World War II. Apparently the victim of boardroom politics, Lady Bracwell-Smith felt she had been treated in "appalling and ruthless" fashion and was now willing to sell her 15.9 per cent stake in the club.

With two rich investors eyeing up the club – Alisher Usmanov from Uzbekistan, and American Stan Kroenke – the potential is there for Arsenal to go the risky way of their Premier League rivals. Kroenke was recently invited on to the board as a partner and claimed that was the limit of his ambition with the club effectively run by shareholder Danny Fiszman.

Another vital development was the appointment of Ivan Gazidis from Major League Soccer in the United States to become the club's chief executive. Whichever players Wenger signs in the transfer window to stabilise the team's defence, it will be his relationship with Gazidis and whoever controls the boardroom that will be most crucial to the club.

Wenger's greatest dream is to win the Champions League, the one trophy that has eluded him in his momentous career. He was close in reaching the semi-finals with Monaco, and even nearer when Arsenal went to the 2006 Final and lost narrowly to Barcelona.

If the arrival of Gazidis brings some calm to the Gunners off the field, it will be a real possibility to claim the Champions League this season when so many big names will be knocked out in the second round.

That Champions League draw – Manchester United v Internazionale, Chelsea v Juventus and Real Madrid v Liverpool – will be a stirring test of the Premier League's bold claim to be the best in the world at the moment. For all the hype that surrounds the English top flight, the truth is that this has so far been a mediocre season in terms of quality.

Liverpool have been dull, United well below their best and Chelsea beginning to become fractious, not least because Abramovich is refusing to spend more over-the-top money on new players. While there was bullish optimism in most of the English media about the Champions League draw, a more realistic assessment is surely that these three matches are all 50-50 encounters in which either side might win.

And watch out for banner headlines of gloom and doom if the Premier League giants were to be defeated.●

> **"While football is beginning to suffer the effects of global financial turbulence, Wenger's ability to create a stylish team without vast spending will be ever more admired"**

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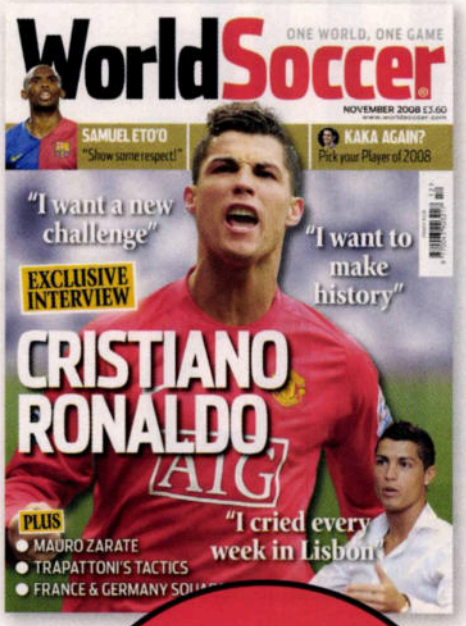

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Tevez's United future uncertain

Wednesday 7th January 2009

Uncertainty over the future of Carlos Tevez future is growing after his agent refused to rule out a move away from Manchester United.

Speculation regarding the striker's future has intensified recently with United boss, Sir Alex Ferguson, failing to secure a permanent deal for the Argentinian. more >>

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The Future of Football

Where is football heading? Can the world game survive in its current form? What does the future hold? In a special feature, *World Soccer* columnists and correspondents contemplate the shape of things to come

Paul Gardner proposes radical changes to the rules in a bid to boost attacking play...page 36

Jon Stanley investigates the scientific developments that could change football forever...page 46

David Conn considers how club ownership may change in the coming years...page 50

Jim Holden recommends a salary cap as a cure for football's financial ills... page 53

Tim Vickery predicts changes in the way South American players are sold to Europe...page 55

Nick Bidwell selects the players who will typify future trends...page 58

Keir Radnedge reflects on the changing nature of world governing body FIFA...page 62

Jean-Marc Bosman warns, in an exclusive interview, that player power could be on the wane...page 66

Dhiman Sarkar turns the spotlight on India, hailed by Sepp Blatter as football's sleeping giant...page 70

A game in

Radical changes – in attitude and to the rule book – are needed if football is to avoid becoming the first sport to finance and coach itself into oblivion.

I HAVE BEEN instructed to peer into the future. I find that 10 years is about as far ahead as I can see, so how about this, as you turn on your television in 2019:

"Good evening sports fans. Here are today's football results. All 10 games in the OPEC Global League ended in 0-0 draws. All 20 teams played with eight defenders, two midfielders and no forwards. All 20 goalkeepers received Man of the Match awards. No red or yellow cards were issued. And there were no spectators at any of the games."

Don't laugh. We're heading in that direction. Goal scoring in football has been declining steadily for decades. That is glaring fact – just look at the World Cup records, which show a goals-per-game statistic going down, down, down. In 1958 it was 3.6. It has never got above 3.0 since then. The most recent, 2006, figure of 2.3 was the second lowest ever. In that tournament, 37 games (out of 64) saw two, or fewer, goals. Only four games produced more than four goals each.

Coaches now think almost entirely in defensive terms. The one-forward formation is increasingly employed. Defenders get away with rough-house tackles while referees scan the field for evidence of diving. Goalkeepers have acquired a hugely dominant role. And for how long will the fans continue to flock to a sport that seems not to care about providing entertainment?

Paul Gardner

torment

Big barrrier...Middlesbrough keeper Ross Turnbull prepares to repel all-comers in the goalless Premier League draw with North-east rivals Newcastle

Can anyone doubt that providing entertainment is not high on the list of the sport's priorities at the moment? In today's football, defence rules. And the over-emphasis on defence makes for dull games.

"In today's football, defence rules. And the over-emphasis on defence makes for dull games"

The tactics of greed

How has this happened? Why has it been allowed to happen? Money, of course, has a lot to do with it. By now it's a cliche to point out that football is a billion-pound global business. And the effects of all that cash have reached all the way through the sport, and eaten into the very way it is played on the field. Crude cash has, in effect, had an effect on playing tactics, on team formations.

Arguably, the trend started in Italy in the late 1940s when the heavily

defensive *catenaccio* was born, a system concocted to allow the smaller, and poorer, Italian clubs to hold their own with the rich, free-spending giants such as Juventus and Internazionale.

Catenaccio proved so successful that soon the rich clubs were themselves employing it. The modern era of defence-heavy teams was born, created by teams that didn't have money, adopted by rich teams that wanted more money. A child of greed, you might say.

Today, the difference between winning and losing an important game can be measured in millions. Losing such a game can also mean the old heave-ho for a coach. Factors that certainly do not encourage adventurous play or coaching. That is the reality of commercialised football.

Worse, it seems that the more important the game, the more turgid the football. Is it a coincidence that we rarely get a free-flowing, pulsating final these days? The sheer difficulty of scoring goals has led the sport to adopt an absurd tie-breaker to crown winners – we have, as of now, a world champion and a Champions League winner, each crowned as a result of winning a five-minute penalty shootout rather than a 90-minute game.

My interest here is primarily in what happens on the pitch. The structure of the sport I'll leave to others to analyse. Trying to make the differentiation clear, I shall use the word "sport" to mean football in its entirety – the game, the structure, the owners, the sponsors, the marketing, the finances etc – while I shall use "game" to describe what happens among the players on the pitch.

Coaches and referees

Though it is reasonable – and, I've no doubt, at least partly accurate – to blame big money for football's embrace of caution, that is by no means the whole story. For there can be little doubt that the defensive approach and negative tactics it entails have been taken up with tremendous glee by the coaching fraternity.

There is a formula that I started to hear, in the late 1960s as I recall. I believe it started with the English FA coaching courses. It states flatly that there are just three (I think it is three) reasons why goals are scored. All three of them have to do with defensive errors (one, I recall is "lack of pressure on the ball".) That's it – no credit to attacking play whatever. The game is viewed *entirely* from a defensive point of view. If the defence does its job, no goals will be scored. There you have it – the coaches' nirvana, the 0-0 draw.

And please, don't give me that guff about 0-0 games being exciting. One or two a year may be. The rest are simply a bore. The Italian goalscorer Giorgio Chinaglia once set me right on that point with some mangled but convincing logic, saying: "If it's 0-0, it's boring. I don't care if it's a great game, if there are no goals it's boring."

Coaches, however, don't want high-scoring games, they *hate* them. A few months back in the English League One (the third tier), Peterborough United beat Bristol Rovers 5-4. Nine goals! Enjoyment and excitement all around, no? Not exactly. The game was condemned as "farcical" and "absurd" – that was the *winning* coach speaking! And it was precisely the goal-fest that upset him. Our exasperated coach (it was Sir Alex Ferguson's son Darren) then let slip this gem: "It was great for the people watching, but not for us coaches."

An off-the-cuff post-game comment, but one that harshly exposes the contradiction that bedevils today's football. Ferguson's opinion is widely approved. Earlier in 2008, after Celtic had been beaten 3-2 by Barcelona in a highly entertaining game, coach Gordon Strachan moaned: "It might have been a great game to watch for the neutrals, but not for me."

Coaches will shape the game to

"Coaches will shape the game to their own requirements, which do not include playing attractive football"

They shall not pass...Sunderland attempt a goal-line stand at an Arsenal free-kick

Don't make me watch that...Peterborough boss Ferguson could see only the negatives in his team's thrilling 5-4 win

their own requirements, which do not include playing attractive football. There are bags of evidence that coaches and players see entertaining football as something to be scorned, to be avoided. Why would that be? Because a mindset has grown up that entertaining football is not, *cannot* be, winning football. It's one or the other: either you want to win or you want to play pretty football.

Back in 2003, the then Chile coach Juvenal Olmos spelled it out, declaring that qualification for the 2006 World Cup was all that mattered. "I'm not interested in this romantic illusion about playing pretty football," he said. Chile, playing non-pretty football, did not qualify.

When discussing this "romantic illusion", that word "pretty" crops up all the time, a totally derogatory term, implying that entertaining football is toy football, not serious, certainly not manly. In 2007 manager Sam Allardyce cast a dubious eye over his own team, Newcastle United while winning their pre-season games, and opined that these weren't real games, and "when the whistle blows in the Premier League it ain't about pretty football. It's about nitty gritty, do-or-die football".

Openly scornful

So we have a large number of coaches – I would say a majority – who, if not openly scornful of the idea of playing entertaining football, are certainly not about to try it. The notion that pretty football is for wimps goes deep. Alongside the mindset that stresses caution and defensive play goes a mighty tolerance of – even a macho desire for – rough-house play and rule-breaking.

It is difficult to imagine anything more subversive to the integrity of any sport than a widespread agreement to ignore its rules. But that, in effect if not in name, is what we have in football. It is considered perfectly fine for defenders to commit tactical fouls, to knowingly foul an opponent who has broken clear or who has just pulled off some spectacular piece of skill to beat an opponent. A foul in these cases is virtually required. The necessary foul, it seems.

The poet W H Auden ran into trouble when, in his famous poem Spain 1937, he talked about "the necessary murder". George Orwell lambasted him and Auden changed

the adjective. But there is no sign of such contrition among the ranks of coaches. So the necessary foul flourishes. You hear the phrases, "What else could he do?", or "That was a good foul, he'll take the card" – phrases that shriek approval of the rule-breaking.

This bland acceptance of fouling means, inevitably, a rougher, more physical game in which size and strength are more important than skill. A recent quote from Liverpool's Fernando Torres – "Defenders are tall, strong, and fighters and the referees only give you a foul once you are bleeding" – paints the scene.

The chief sufferers from the rough stuff are, naturally enough, players who like the ball at their feet, in particular dribblers. In any survey of the current game, dribbling is worth serious thought because its history unequivocally contradicts those who maintain that the game hasn't changed all that much over the years. In the earliest days of football there was plenty of dribbling – so much, in fact, that football was known as "the dribbling game".

The skill was much admired. Today, dribbling has become the skill that dare not speak its name. Football has turned against the very skill that gave the game its original personality. Dribbling is now looked at with jaundiced eyes; the exponent is selfish, a show-off, he slows the game down.

A modern player with exceptional ball skills is going to have a hard time. He is going to get kicked. A lot. Even this gets justified with a shrug and "Well, he likes to dribble, so what do you expect?"

And so to referees. I would guess that the football referee has the most difficult of all the officiating jobs in sport. And soccer's low-scoring rate certainly exacerbates his problems.

With most games decided by a single goal the referee knows that a single decision of his – even in the first minute – may well decide the outcome. It would be naive to believe that such pressure does not have an effect, particularly when it comes to penalty decisions.

The resultant caution is part of what I perceive as a refereeing bias towards the defensive side of the game. In last December's Barcelona-Real Madrid game, Lionel Messi – arguably the most skillful player in today's game – was mercilessly fouled four times in the first 14 minutes.

Marked man...Barcelona's Lionel Messi was subjected to a series of crude fouls in the game against Real Madrid but his assailants went unpun

These were dangerous fouls on Messi's ankles. Yet the referee issued no cards, despite mounting evidence that the player was being targeted.

That was a clear example of the sort of cynical, systematic rule-breaking I discussed earlier. For that approach to become endemic in the game, it has needed help from the referees. This it has got. In fact, the referees themselves have invented a nice little dodge which allows them to be kind to defenders – the verbal caution. You won't find it in the book; the only caution there is a yellow card. But a typical image of the modern referee is of him talking to, lecturing if you like, a player, telling him not to do that again, while the victim lies writhing on the ground. The assumption must be that the

Paul Gardner

offending player doesn't know the rules* of the game, and needs to be informed. This is ludicrous, a clear sign that modern refereeing is simply not strong enough to counter systematic rule-breaking.

"Modern refereeing is simply not strong enough to counter systematic rule-breaking"

I have been chastising coaches and referees and, to a lesser extent, players who combine to produce a defensive game which blithely ignores the rules. Certainly, I regard them as guilty of despoiling football, of producing a game far from being the spectacle which it could be. But the ultimate responsibility for the banalisation of football lies within the game itself.

As currently structured, the rules of the game have allowed the situation to develop where coaches feel, with considerable justification, that the most reliable way to win (or not to lose) – and to keep their jobs – is by using defensively-oriented tactics. As for referees – who are to some extent caught in the middle of this defensive/creative tug-of-war – the rules do not give them the tools to deal effectively with the systematic rule-breaking that has become so prevalent.

What's to be done?

The attractions of football seem, at this moment, to be global and irresistible. But the moment, like all moments, is deceptive. It is fleeting. The rise and rise of football cannot go on forever. Nothing is forever.

**I use the term rules – not laws. The usage of laws is a fusty hangover from English Victorian pomposity. These are not legal matters, edicts enacted by a government, or possibly even handed down from Mount Sinai. The pseudo-solemnity that laws imply is, I would argue, part of the sport's problem, an archaic attempt to compel obedience through fear.*

Tastes change, social conditions change, wealth patterns change – how likely is it that football will simply plough on unchanged? Forget it. The game of football will change, as it has been changing for the past three decades – and, I believe, changing for the worse.

It can be argued that the changes have been strictly according to Darwinian rules of natural selection. The football that we have is the football that has survived. It has grown naturally and should be allowed to go on doing so, with minimal interference – meaning, with as few changes to its rules as possible.

That seems to be the current wisdom, but it is dangerously wrong.

The negative changes that I have been talking about have arisen in response to pernicious influences – particularly the power of money and the rise of defensive football.

Have we got the sort of football that we want? A game full of 0-0 and 1-0 scorelines? A game that seems to shun the very idea of being entertaining? An increasingly physical game in which size and strength count for more than football skills?

I'm going to make the assumption that most people involved in football would like to see a livelier, more open, game with more goals. That's not quite the sure-fire assumption I'd like it to be, that much can be seen from what I've already said. But let's go with it.

If we haven't got the football we desire, then we can do something about it. We can, without too much fuss, alter the rules.

It is strange that football seems reluctant to take a close look at itself. I know of no instance where it has carried out a thorough analysis of the game as played on the field. (There have been two overall rules revisions, but these have been designed to rationalise already existing rules).

After every World Cup and every European Championship technical reports are issued describing the football that was played. I have read most of these reports and I cannot

Going with the flow...modern referees are often praised when they let fouls go unpunished

recall ever seeing anything that even hinted at criticism. Never a discussion on the quality of the football, never an opinion expressed. Thus the awful Greece team of 2004, the specialists in low-scoring and boredom, receive the same non-judgmental treatment as the vastly different Spaniards of 2008.

The authors of these reports are mostly coaches and they reflect the narrow coaching view. One can imagine that if a trend did indeed develop towards playing with eight full-backs and two midfielders, it would be greeted with the same bland equanimity, not praised, but not condemned either.

There is no overall vision of the game here, and one realises that if war is too important to be left to the generals, then football matters too much to be entrusted to the coaches.

If the coaches won't speak out, a different voice must be found. Because the game is in need of leadership. It is up to football people themselves to decide what they want their sport to be. They can set the standards for the future, then they can take steps to meet those standards.

I'm suggesting that it is time for a State of the Game document (let me re-emphasise that I am considering here *only* the game as played on the pitch). My suggestion is made rather timidly, because I'm only too aware that it sounds a rather bureaucratic idea. But it is common practice for governments, industries and other institutions to hold periodic reviews of their own activity. By no means are all these reports mere academic exercises. Much good has come from them.

Of course there are many problems in producing such a document. Who will write it? A committee, of course. Yes, I'm aware that FIFA already has a Football Committee. But I'm not aware it has ever achieved anything. Anyway, the committee I'm thinking of has to be independent, with a strong, independent chairman. Which means that it should not be a FIFA-run or FIFA-appointed body.

It must be a committee of such authority and influence that its recommendations will be heeded. And who would appoint the committee? These are all obvious difficulties, but they are not insoluble. If the cause is compelling, a solution will be found.

The biggest objection is that the production of a State of the Game report would take time, a year or more I would guess. It seems to me that a more immediate remedy for what ails football is needed, and that could come from a stepped-up programme of rule changes, the sort of thing that FIFA and the IFAB do every year, piecemeal changes that have been made over the past decade or so, that nibble at the edge of the problem of the defensive game without coming to grips with its full implications. These have been modifications that are essentially reactions to undesired changes that have already made themselves felt in the sport.

A more co-ordinated programme of rule changes is required – pro-active ones that would start with the corrective aim of producing a more attacking game.

I list below a number of changes that could be made to the game – not all of them are changes to the rules – with the specific aim of tilting the game away from defensive dominance towards a closer balance between offence and defence. That balance, which is essential for all competitive sports, has been lost in the modern game. This is really the phone-in, email part of the article, because the list is far from exhaustive, of course.

Some modest proposals

Not all the blame for the lack of goals can be laid at the door of packed and ruthless defences. Poor attacking must take a share. A corner kick used to be considered a likely scoring opportunity but hardly seems so these days. In the 2006 World Cup, only 12 of the 147 goals were scored from corners. The average number of corners per game was 10.5, for a total of 672 in 64 games. Put bleakly, it needed 56 corners to produce one goal. I'm told that in Germany they used to say that three corners equals one penalty kick. Not any more. But I think much of the ineffectiveness of corners can be ascribed to utterly feeble delivery, the inability to deliver the ball accurately to somewhere around the penalty spot. Does anyone practise taking corners any more? Considering the number of corners that come down inside the six-yard box to be gobbled up gratefully by the goalkeeper, I doubt it.

A state of affairs that suggests that the very will to attack has somehow become attenuated. The suggestions I make below are all designed, in their different ways, to re-ignite that will. Before going through some possible changes, two more difficulties must be faced (no one said this was going to be easy).

Firstly, a rule change is like a stone thrown into water, it causes ripples – and these ripples spread throughout the game, causing who knows what in terms of subsidiary adjustments. Of one thing you can be certain: the adjustments will be defensive in nature. Karl Popper's famous Law of Unintended Consequences could have been formulated with football in

"If war is too important to be left to the generals, football matters too much to be entrusted to the coaches"

Corner routine...Ecuador's Edison Mendez at Germany 2006

Grecian burn... Michalis Kapsis and Theo Zagorakis ensure Luis Figo isn't going anywhere in the 2004 European Championship Final

mind. Hence: only one rule change at a time – the ripples and counter-ripples and sub-ripples produced by simultaneous changes would make any meaningful assessment impossible.

Secondly, any change, at least in theory, needs to be tested. But can you imagine the English Premier League or the Bundesliga or Serie A agreeing to play a season using a domestic version of the game different from what everyone else was playing (reverting, of course, to the unmodified game whenever international games are scheduled)? Not going to happen. Either a change has to rely on something considerably less than a full trial, or it is introduced, universally, at one fell swoop.

So, the first four changes listed below are basically attempts to alter the defensive mentality rather than the rules themselves.

That's the way to do it...matchwinner Fernando Torres hails Euro 2008 triumph for scintillating Spain

● Insist on a strict application of the existing rule, particularly in dealing with rough play and with tactical fouling. This would surely lead to a sudden spate of yellow and red cards, at which point the coaches would protest, the referees and administrators would lose their determination, and yet another "clampdown" would wither away. Meaning, that I don't see much hope in this approach.

● In the standings, award points for goals scored. Such a system was used for years in the now defunct North American Soccer League. It went like this: six points for a win, three for a draw, none for a defeat – plus a point for each goal scored up to a maximum of three. Thus, in a 6-3 win, the winning team would get the maximum nine points, the losers three.

● Deduct points from a team's total for foul play. Devise a simple points system for fouls, penalty kicks, yellow and red cards, fix levels of acceptability – and teams that go over the limit get docked. More pressure on the referees, of course.

● The penalty shoot-out is glaring evidence of football's low-scoring problem. It has become so difficult to resolve tournament games with *real* goals that synthetic penalty-kick goals must be used. But the shootout makes matters worse because it encourages even more defensive play – by those

Spot on...Carlos Tevez beats Chelsea's Petr Cech in the Champions League Final penalty shootout

teams that fancy their chances of winning it. Hence, use the shootout only as a tiebreaker of last resort. The first should be corner kicks – a system that is not simply a gimmick tacked on at the end of a game, but one that works throughout and which rewards teams who attack.

The following modifications do involve changes to the playing rules:

● Increase the size of the goals. This has been suggested many times, and has regularly been mocked as the most ridiculous idea ever and countered with sardonic jokes about using smaller goalkeepers. But the idea has merit. Goalkeepers are no doubt bigger and better trained than they used to be, defences are stronger and better organised. The 8ft x 8yd goal may well belong to another era. Refusing to consider a change in its dimensions is like ignoring the enormous growth in vehicle ownership and insisting that we continue to use two-lane motorways.

● Reduce the influence of the goalkeeper. The vast area within which he is allowed the enormous advantage of being able to handle the ball is absurd – 792 square yards, half as big again as a basketball court! Get rid of the six-yard markings, which serve no purpose at all, mark out a new, smaller penalty area – say one of 12, rather than 18 yards. This would reduce the 'keeper's domain by half, and might well have the added advantage of encouraging referees, confronted with fewer decisions, not to chicken out on penalty decisions.

● Possible further experiments with the offside rule. The one that seems to me to have some promise is to banish offside once the ball is *inside* the penalty area. This would still rule out the long ball hoofed down the field, but would mean more opportunities for quick passing interchanges within the area. But... if the smaller area suggested above is accepted, then maybe this change becomes meaningless.

● Give referees more authority in dealing with rough play and tactical fouls. Divide fouls, as basketball does, into two categories: personal (ie contact fouls) and technical (eg verbal abuse, time-wasting). As things stand a violent foul and a trivial offence like removing a shirt to celebrate scoring are likely to receive equal punishment.

I don't believe that anyone finds that satisfactory. Giving a lesser punishment for technical fouls would erase that anomaly but at the same time the personal fouls must be harshly dealt with.

● Find a way to avoid a team playing with 10 men. This usually destroys a game, ruins its entertainment value, because playing short-handed is an open invitation to resort to ultra-defensive football. A red-carded player should be replaced – but an additional method of punishing the offending team must be introduced.

Summing up

In football we have a superb game which is getting less superb with each passing year. It has become an unbalanced game, seriously distorted in favour of defence. It seems to have forgotten that it is an absolutely unique game, played with the feet. Its name is football. And its lifeblood, its red corpuscles, are goals.

It now marginalises its most characteristic and dazzling skill, dribbling, while allowing a hugely dominant role to the one player who uses his hands. The goalkeeper is also the most defensive player in the team, the one whose role is to prevent the scoring of those life-giving goals.

Football without goals, in the lovely, memorable words of one of its greatest players, Alfredo Di Stefano, is like an afternoon without sun. And so the bleak, sunless 0-0 draw should be a rarity. Instead, the blight of defensive football has elevated it to an almost state-of-the-art scoreline.

The thrust of this article is not, as some might believe, to move the game backwards to some imagined golden age. What I'm looking for is a modern game that respects the core values of the game, in particular its attacking skills, the ones that breed its uniqueness and its excitement. For decades now, these skills have been struggling against an increasingly physical game, a game in which muscular power threatens to become its most important element. I'm looking for a modern game in which balance is restored, between attack and defence, between the short player and the tall player, between artistry and physical power.

I'm looking for a game that is structured so that scoring goals, not bunkering down in defence, is the way to win games. I'm looking for the sport to show, as it surely can, that attractive football is not merely a romantic illusion.

"I'm looking for the sport to show that attractive football is not merely a romantic illusion"

Sadly, I don't think that state of affairs will come about by any natural development. It needs to be encouraged and in this respect the sport's leaders, from FIFA through the confederations and so on down to the coaches and referees, have not really been heard from.

All the changes I have suggested above will meet with resistance – from within the sport. They will be considered frivolous or too expensive or unworkable or unnecessary. I can only say this: they are all made with a genuine desire to allow football to show itself off in its full glory. Football should not be a costive affair that begrudgingly allows us the occasional goal, but a fast-paced, skillful, flowing game in which creative players are allowed to exercise their skills without getting knocked down every time they do something clever, a game that is as exciting to play as it is to watch, a game that features goals not as an oddity but as a guaranteed part of the feast.

I see no reason why, with a concerted effort, that should not happen. But without that effort I fear that football may well become the first sport to finance and coach itself into oblivion. ●

Red card...the way forward?

GARDNER'S CHANGES

Changing attitudes

1. Stricter application of existing rules, especially regarding rough play and tactical fouls.
2. Award extra points for goals scored.
3. Deduct points for foul play.
4. Introduce number of corner kicks as the tie-breaker to decide a drawn match, with penalties used only as the last resort.

Changing rules

1. Bigger goals. Simple, controversial, effective.
2. Reduce the size of the penalty area to limit the influence of the goalkeeper.
3. Further changes of offside rule, possibly limiting its use to within the penalty area.
4. Give referees more power to punish violent fouls by dividing fouls into personal (eg contact fouls) and technical (eg time-wasting).
5. Find an alternative way to punish teams who have a player sent off by replacing an expelled player and adopting an additional way of punishing his team.

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

The appliance of science

Jon Stanley outlines 20 ways in which scientific developments could change football forever

FASTER, FITTER, STRONGER

1 Footballers of the future will be fitter and quicker than ever before. Advanced strength and power systems which adapt to the individual as they train will assess a player's metabolic and nervous systems. Electrical stimulus of muscles will optimise training sessions.

Miles East, a sports performance consultant and fitness coach who works with Premier League players, says: "I expect players to benefit hugely from new training methods and technology. They will be at least 10 per cent quicker, cover much more ground in a game and niggling injuries will almost be eradicated."

GENE DOPING

2 Aside from developments in synthetic drugs, future athletes will have access to myriad scientific and medical developments to enhance performance. Gene doping – permanently inserting strength- or endurance-boosting genes into DNA – was banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency in 2003 but, by its very nature, is almost impossible to detect.

By giving natural evolution a helping hand, sportsmen – illegally or otherwise – will be able to enhance certain genetic characteristics that are allied to speed, strength, size, endurance and muscle mass in order to become "superhuman" athletes.

ARTIFICIAL ORGANS

3 Simon Eassom, head of Sports Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester, believes footballers might one day run on artificial hearts. "If athletes are prepared to go to the lengths of having dialysis to remove traces of steroids, it would kind of make sense that they would be prepared to go to the length of putting an artificial heart valve in them to make their blood pump better," he says.

Alternatively, a transplanted cornea could mean better eyesight, surgically altered nerves could improve reaction times and transplanted lungs could dramatically increase aerobic capacity.

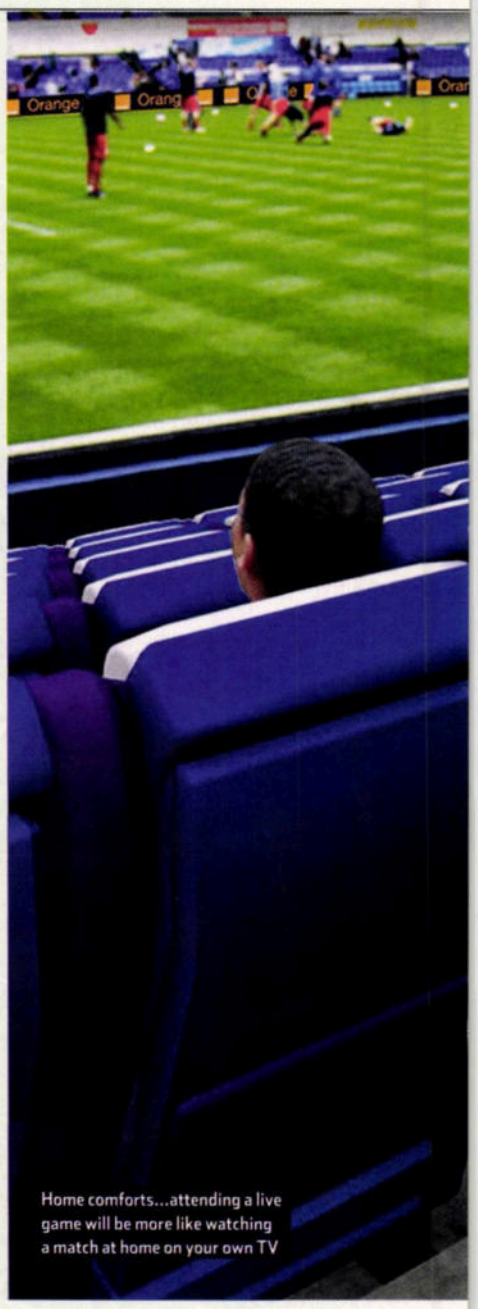
STEM CELL BANKING

4 Treatment of injuries will be revolutionised. Stem cell banking – whereby footballers keep their children's umbilical cords and child prodigies have biopsies to safeguard against the future – will allow gene therapy to cut injury recovery time. Sensors in a player's kit will measure forces and tolerances so coaches can act before injury occurs.

ROBOT OFFICIALS

5 Although it seems the stuff of science fiction, scientists believe that human error in officiating can be removed by replacing referees with robots. The University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa has developed Aiden, a card-playing computer programme with a human personality trait – bluffing.

Martin Redley, a computer programmer and robotics researcher, says: "We are very quickly getting ourselves into a place where robots can not only mimic human behaviour but actually become human-like. It will be possible for them to referee matches and evaluate situations in a logical and well-thought-out manner, removing much of the guesswork from the process."



Home comforts...attending a live game will be more like watching a match at home on your own TV

ROBOT LINESMEN

6 Even if referees are not replaced by automatons in the future, their assistants could become

"The football fan of the future will demand more than a plastic seat and a half-time pie"

The future's already here...the 2007 Robo-One Special Cup in Japan

automated, with players linked to Global Position System (GPS) navigation devices. Match officials could then use GPS receivers to determine offside positions and accurately detect where free-kicks and thrown-ins should be taken from.

CHIPS IN PLAYERS

7 Sensors in the ball and players' boots and shin-pads would not only provide accurate information about who last touched the ball for disputed throw-ins and corners, but also identify conclusively which players have been fouled and which are guilty of "simulation". This information could be transmitted directly to the referees or to giant screens in the stadium.

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

8 Players will communicate with each other and their managers via mobile devices sited on their bodies. If a player is tiring or a tactical change is required, team captains and coaches will be able to relay information quickly and effectively.

NANOSHIRTS

9 Today's football shirts already contain materials which allow heat and sweat to escape the body, but Nick Barber of Umbro believes this is just the tip of the iceberg. "Several leading footballers are already using nutrient-releasing patches during play which replace the minerals lost by the body through sweating," he says. "It is technically

"GPS receivers could determine offsides"

No excuses...technology will ensure match officials get decisions right every time

possible, through the use of nanotechnology, that such minerals could be incorporated into the fabric of a football kit and absorbed in the same way. It would mean each and every shirt being designed with an individual footballer in mind."

Nike's Leo Sandino-Taylor says sports companies are continually working on a whole raft of new technologies. He says: "We always look to other sports for learnings. For example, in rugby we know that the diagonal sash across our current jersey can disrupt opponents' vision. Taking into account the traditions of club colours, perhaps we will see something similar come into football, with it being made easier to pick out your team-mate who is wearing a scientifically tested colour system."

Looking good...Ronaldo's Champions League Final boot (above) and ProZone's match analysis (right)

Sandino-Taylor also says that fans will one day be able to own the exact same boots as their favourite stars. He explains: "Many players have their boots tailor-made to their very specific requirements. Last season we made a one-off boot for Cristiano Ronaldo before the Champions League Final from a special carbon fibre.

"We're some way down this road with our Nike iD range, but in the future I can see fans having their own boots made from the same materials, same dimensions and same individual specifications as the top pros."

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

10 Already used by a number of Premier League and Championship clubs, computer software like ProZone – the analytical tool which allows managers to view every movement, interaction and contribution of both his players and those of the opposition – is set to take an even more central role.

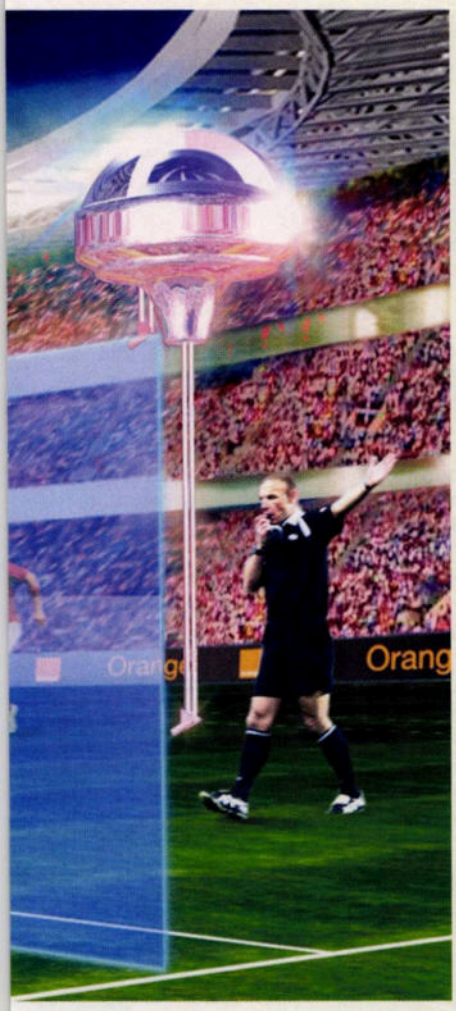
Coaches will be able to use cameras covering every blade of grass to assess whether a particular player is working hard enough during a game.

Artificial intelligence software will also be able to look at a player's body language and assess whether his gait indicates he is about to lose his temper with a referee or opponent. In both instances a manager can affect a substitution accordingly.

PAY AS YOU PLAY

11 Expect a more studious approach to contract negotiations. While the top stars will always demand the highest wages, squad players will see performance data from the likes of ProZone factored into negotiations.

The precedent is already there in other sports. "In South African rugby



union, some clubs are basing players' contracts on how they perform objectively, using our data," says Barry McNeill of ProZone.

CLIMATE CHANGE

12 Stadia could create their own microclimates by triggering rainfall well before matches are due to kick-off, ensuring that no rain falls during games. Rockets that release dry ice into rain clouds could be incorporated into grounds.

RECYCLING

13 Consumption of energy and water will be a key factor in a world blighted by global warming. Every stadium will recycle rainfall and have solar panels to generate electricity. Water shortage will make turf pitches a thing of the past, with artificial pitches being the norm.

HALF-TIME REWINDS

14 The football fan of the future will demand more than a plastic seat and a half-time pie. Each seat will have its own TV monitor with instant replays available and a choice of camera angles. In-seat services will include food and drink delivery, and half-time shopping could also be introduced.

VIRTUAL FANS

15 Supporters who cannot attend the game will be able to watch on their mobile phones. Computer-rendered stadia and avatars will replace live action on the handset with fans able to select where they "sit" in the virtual ground.

WATCHING AT HOME

16 Could the future herald the end of football as a live spectator event? As we become more accustomed to the complete viewing experience from our armchair, Roy Jones, professor of sports technology at Loughborough University, says: "We could have scenarios in the future where no one goes to watch sport live, preferring instead to watch it on television."

Even if the live game prevails, expect to watch 3D holographic TV in pubs, giant screens outside grounds and in the home. Holographs could also be used to create images of fans to give the impression of full stadiums.

Cheers...pubs will screen games in 3D

DOWNLOAD TAXES

17 The Premier League is already struggling to keep up with the illegal internet streaming of live games, so how will the owners of football broadcasting rights police the future use of their product?

It is possible that broadband users who participate in file-sharing could be forced to pay a fee which will be passed on to copyright holders, according to their internet traffic. With a worldwide audience for the Premier League, such a tax would offset any loss of value to their TV rights.

Virtual stars...you will be able to create your own online football career

GAMES FOR A LAUGH

18 Gaming will remain at the heart of football, but virtual worlds – as seen in Football Superstars – will replace the traditional video games such as Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA.

In FS you play online with thousands of others in order to build a successful career for your avatar. But it's off the pitch where the real possibilities lie as virtual towns allow you to can spend the spoils of your hard-earned fame – buying jewellery, cars and tattoos, and visiting the best bars and restaurants.

"Ultimately we could see football fans congregating in virtual pubs and bars to watch Premier League football together online," says FS developer Malcolm Clark. "Interaction between supporters will be in real time so the lines between the real and virtual world blur almost completely."

SCOUT AND ABOUT

19 Technology will transform scouting. Andy Cooper from Scout7, who provide player information management systems to 75 per cent of the Premier League and many high profile clubs across Europe, believes the use of coordinated databases will become imperative.

"Systems like ours help clubs make sound financial decisions by quickly and efficiently providing information on potential transfer subjects," says Cooper. "We look into their backgrounds, their injury records, their performances, how long they've stayed at a club and the standard of football at which they play.

"Of course, a judgement on a player is always going have a degree of subjectivity, depending on whether you like what you see. But we believe that scouting information systems will increasingly provide reliable indicators for clubs entering the transfer market."

STADIUMS OF THE FUTURE

20 No more traffic problems getting to the ground as we'll already live there! As clubs move out into the suburbs to build their state-of-the-art stadiums, sites will be rejuvenated with the creation of villages with retail and residential areas. Fans can then feel fully integrated into the fabric of a club which is literally on their doorstep.

Thanks to the Orange Future of Football report. www.orange.co.uk/sport

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Same old story

In football, a great deal changes but a great deal will stay unchanged

ASKED TO SURVEY the football scene 15 years ago, and produce a view of the future in 2008-09, even the shrewdest business visionary (of whom, we now know, there are really not very many) could not have predicted where the game has landed today.

Nobody, surely, would have said confidently that Manchester United would be owned by a near-reclusive Florida family who would load the club with £667million of debt, or that United's bitter rivals City would be bought by a toppled Thai prime minister who, convicted of corruption at home, would sell the club to a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family.

Tasked with picking a future chairman of the arcane and deeply conservative Football Association, it would have been long odds on David Triesman, a former communist and general secretary of the Labour Party. Who would have thought Michel Platini, then just stepped down from coaching France's national side, would become a future president of UEFA?

Richest leagues

In a generation, football's very scale has been transformed. It would have taken a brave man back then – or a ballsy agent – to predict that top players would be paid up to £160,000 a week in Europe's richest leagues (and still, incidentally, be described by the FIFA president as slaves). English clubs, stumbling back into European competition after the five-year Heysel ban, cannot have been envisaged dominating a hugely expanded competition called the Champions League – for which qualifying clubs do not even have to be champions – and which generates more than £500m a season in TV revenue alone.

Italian football, strutting imperiously, was the envy of Europe and the world, so who would have imagined their beautiful game would become wracked by the kinds of crises blighting English football when Heysel befell the game in 1985. We were a long way then from conceiving of the English top flight as the richest and most watched in the world – or from believing that even with billions rolling in, most of its clubs would be desperate for money and up for sale.

So the task of predicting where the game will be 15 or 20 years from here is fiendish, impossible, even reckless. Will football's very structures have finally been cracked wide open? Will there be a European superleague for clubs – all of them owned by Arab sheikhs or Indian steel moguls – who play matches abroad in their bid for global domination? Will many other wannabe clubs have collapsed under an avalanche of bad debts? On the field, will the English clubs' pre-eminence continue or will the Italian game undergo a cycle of reform which nurtures it back to health? Will football, in short, go staggering madly about the globe, drunk with money, its highlights watched live on hand-held appliances by the huddled masses?

Maybe. But go back again to where we were in 1993-94, step back even

Blazing a trail...Manchester United goalkeeper Ray Wood is greeted by the Duke of Edinburgh before the 1957 FA Cup Final

David Conn

50 years, and take a steadier look. Yes, the game has expanded enormously, and many things have changed dramatically, but it is striking how much has stayed the same.

In England, in both those eras, Manchester United was the dominant club, as it is today. There were four divisions of professional clubs, with 92 in total, and so there are today, even if the way the money is shared around has been carved up in favour of the richest. United also skipped into the latter stages of the European Cup in 1958 before the Munich air crash, and 50 years later they won the trophy.

Real Madrid won the competition in 1958 and 1959, Milan annihilated Barcelona 4-0 in 1993 and these great clubs are still European giants now. Brazil, World Cup winners in 1958 and 1994, will be a pre-eminent power again in South Africa in 2010.

The game was loved the world over and was a liberating, unifying experience for millions, just as it is now. Football was beamed on television nationally and round the world, yet all clubs and their grounds were embraced as homes of local belonging, as they are now, even as millions tune in to European action across Asia and the Middle East.

British missionaries

In football, a great deal changes but a great deal stays the same. It grew to become the world's most popular team game very rapidly after it was first spread by British merchants or missionaries at the tail-end of the 19th century. A great many clubs, large and small, in Europe, South America and elsewhere, were formed then and have survived, and developed, through the interruptions of war and the threat of perennial financial crisis. The game, broadly speaking, has only grown, expanded to new regions, and its structures, with FIFA formed in 1904 and UEFA in 1954, have remained remarkably intact while managing this spread. The longevity and stability of the game and the clubs, for all their struggles and changes in ownership, invests in them the lucrative value the moneymen see when they adopt the language of brands.

To tease out where the game might be in 15 or 20 years, we need to look at the forces of change, commercial and political, and imagine where they will push structures which have stood the test of time. Ownership is perhaps the easiest of the lot – clubs will change hands, inevitably.

It is difficult to believe the Glazer family will still own United because they appear so motivated by the profit to be made from selling the club on. Roman Abramovich too, perhaps even the very phenomenon of Russian oligarchs, owning so much of the country's resources, has the feel of fleeting history. Sheikh Mansour of Abu Dhabi seems an altogether more stickable possibility at City; his Al Nahyan family has ruled Abu Dhabi since the 17th century and their wealth is only growing as western economies crumble. Yet Mansour bought the football club as a business investment, and so will want to see a profit, which can only come from selling, so he will probably be gone, too, from Eastlands by 2023-24.

"The Glazer family appear so motivated by the profit to be made from selling Manchester United on"

Still at the top...United celebrate their 2008 Champions League triumph over Chelsea in Moscow

Trophy assets

Where the English clubs will fetch up is more difficult to envisage. In 15 years they have passed from men like Peter Swales, City's former owner who made his money in rented tellies in Manchester, to the richest people on Earth. The clubs in Italy and Spain are a cycle behind that, now attracting richer businessmen and odd corporations to buy from the locals. In England, will the clubs be passed around the Forbes list, trophy assets sold by rich men to each other? Or will true corporations – Disney, Google, ESPN – or industrial conglomerates buy them to add sheen and diversity to their businesses? TV companies have an obvious interest in buying clubs but for reasons of competition are unlikely to be allowed.

Will the beacons of mutual, supporter ownership survive in this sea of leverage and speculation? Barcelona and Real Madrid have been

The future of football

owned by their members, their *socios*, since their formation and although their directors grumble periodically that this status limits their ability to raise money from outside investors, the clubs' size and the power of belonging is likely to keep fans loyal to this form of ownership.

Money growth

With hiccups for credit crunches and recessions, the money will surely grow as it has relentlessly throughout football's history.

To assess how this will affect the game's structure, let us start with some certainties. Whoever owns them, for whatever motive, in 15 years time Manchester United, Real Madrid, Milan, Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Arsenal, Liverpool, Juventus, Internazionale, and thousands more clubs in hundreds of countries will still exist, all striving for glory. Millions of people will play football and millions will watch it, in the grounds and on TV. Stars will be born in *favelas* and urban backstreets, and polished up in academies, professionalised at increasingly young ages.

Investors will turn increasingly to human talent as a means of making money – buying the "economic rights" to the players themselves, following the lead of Kia Joorabchian, who discovered in a brief period in charge at Corinthians, which subsequently went bust, that there is more money in buying and selling players, not clubs. The football authorities express disapproval, but FIFA's rules outlaw third parties only from having "material influence" on clubs, and so new funds, like the Hero Global Football Fund, with £26m from Dubai and the stamp of credibility from Alan Hansen, are setting up for a slice of the business.

Interested party...Kia Joorabchian

Yet there remain major hurdles. The NBA, and particularly the NFL, are commercial sports franchises operating in a US bubble. Football, by contrast, is the world's game, whose governing bodies are strong and increasingly close. A single, already wealthy league would need vast political diplomacy to justify such an exercise. FIFA and UEFA will stand against it.

The best bet is that "Game 39" will not happen at all for competitive matches, but money-spinning exhibition friendlies, played by European clubs in prime locations around the world, will increase.

Even a year ago, few in European football had, truly, heard of Bin Hammam. Now he is a major player. He is letting it be known that in return for clubs from the rich European nations expanding into Asia, he would like help developing football in his vast confederation of 50 countries, where only seven – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Australia and China – have professional leagues. It is safe to expect these new football territories to grow in status and seriousness. World football's greatest challenge is to develop the game evenly, as a sport to be played, at the same time as it explodes remorselessly as an entertainment for TV consumption.

"Joorabchian found at Corinthians there is more money in buying and selling players, not clubs"

Yet this inevitable commercial expansion may not alter the game's structure into some almighty future shock. Here is a prediction: there will be no breakaway European superleague. The big clubs threatened it seriously 10 years ago but UEFA expanded the Champions League to head it off. That sated major clubs' appetites, they have disbanded G-14 and joined the UEFA "family", domestic leagues serve them very well and the Champions League is the tasty jam on top.

"Game 39", or competitive club matches played abroad, are unlikely to happen either. Chief executive Richard Scudamore's seeming paranoia that the English Premier League must expand to survive, springs partly from the American NFL and NBA staging matches abroad now. Scudamore won't give up on the idea and recently Mohamed Bin Hammam, president of the Asian Football Confederation, said he could co-operate with it if some benefits flowed to football in the regions where matches were played.

Clubs will be bought and sold, then, and ownership will take forms we cannot foresee. Football will change, but it is, at root, remarkably constant. Many of the clubs in the great football countries were formed in the 30 years after the English FA first unified their set of rules in 1863. The governing bodies, leagues and cups, at club and international level, have mostly endured, developing usually along controlled lines, not blasted by breakaways into some virtual hyper-world. For all the fuss and fury, that remains the most likely pattern of the next 15 years. Including one other thing – that football will still be a minor sport in America.●

Major player... Bin Hammam is keen for more co-operation between Asia and European clubs

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Jim Holden

Earning power...but Matteo Brighi of Roma and Chelsea's Deco could find their clubs forced to trim wages

The cap fits

The credit crunch will force changes to club spending on wages and players

MICHEL PLATINI has been an eager advocate of the introduction of salary caps since his election as the president of UEFA. His idealism, as well as his power base among the smaller nations of Europe, makes him a natural supporter of a scheme that might reduce the power of the giant clubs of England, Italy and Spain, and allow many more teams a realistic chance of winning trophies.

What makes the Platini dream a real possibility in football's near future is a more practical concern – the global credit crunch that has already begun to bite at even the richest clubs. When Chelsea's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich wants to squeeze the purse strings all things are possible.

The financial meltdown among the world's biggest banking institutions, aggravated by lax governmental regulation, has a clear parallel with the untrammelled ability of rich men to use football as a plaything and distort the sporting market.

A new system of salary caps, forcing the clubs to live within their means, and promoting more equal competition within domestic leagues and across Europe, is an idea rapidly gaining support.

Crusader...Platini is a keen advocate of salary caps in Europe

The Football League in England is considering such a scheme and FA chairman Lord Triesman also believes it should be examined. Others such as Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge want the idea debated at a time when the level of player wages at some clubs has reached a monstrous and obscene level.

Whether the motivation is to reduce costs or to promote a more level playing field between clubs, what is now called "competitive balance", the use of salary caps is widespread in team sports and leagues across the world – from Australia to America to European rugby.

The future of football

Jim Holden

Can they all be wrong? Or is it the case that European football is now finally going to pursue the path of financial sanity?

Salary caps come in many guises, and I think it's instructive to look at the three variations currently being used in the trio of major North American sporting leagues where the riches generated, and the wage levels of the star players, are on same scale as the wealthiest European soccer leagues.

The gridiron NFL employs what is known as a "hard-cap" system. This means there is an absolute limit on the amount of cash each team can spend on player salaries in any season. It is equal for each club and there are strict penalties for breaking the barriers, either by fines or the cancellation of player contracts. There is also an absolute lower limit on salaries, so that the club owners must spend at least 85 per cent of the salary cap figure on wages. This gives protection in the system to players, whose overall earnings cannot be driven down.

A clear result of this hard-cap has been to even out the strength of NFL clubs. The richest owners are not able to stockpile the best players in the way that Real Madrid or Manchester United can in soccer. Another perceived benefit has been to cut the cost of running teams, and it is widely accepted that the NFL has the most stable finances of sport in America.

Hot property

In the hugely popular NBA basketball domain they operate a "soft-cap" system. Teams are allowed to break the salary limit in cases when it allows them to retain the rights to a player already in their squad. If a young player develops into a hot property the club can increase his wages and keep him without having to lose another star.

The fans like this scheme because it recognises and rewards player loyalty. In the NBA there is also a maximum individual salary a player can earn, which helps to limit costs.

Baseball has another twist again. The teams agree a wise amount that should be spent by clubs each season on player wages, but there is no formal salary cap. Instead, they institute a so-called "luxury tax", which is levied on any club spending more on wages than has been mutually agreed. The excess expenditure incurs a "tax", which is paid to central league coffers then redistributed to rival teams that have stayed within the agreed limits.

Luxury...Yankees pitchers CC Sabathia and AJ Burnett have agreed mega deals

Artificial financial power...Abramovich

The wealthy New York Yankees club regularly pay out "luxury tax" in the hope that spending extra money on wages will buy success. This is a possible route that European soccer could follow to mitigate the effect of billionaire owners such as Abramovich, whose massive expenditure on wages at Chelsea has been funded by his private wealth rather than business profits.

It is a clever system that might avoid the legal pitfalls of a salary cap system in Europe, yet do something practical and admirable to curb the artificial financial power of an Abramovich, to counter what the Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger refers to as "financial doping". The more a club such as Chelsea spends, the more there is for everyone else to spend, too.

Such a voluntary scheme is certain to be required if a salary cap is to be introduced in European soccer, as Platini and many others wish. It is one that might work, because the billionaires could still spend their money if they wanted to.

Any salary cap system in Europe would also have to be adjusted to account for the very different tax regimes that exist across the nations of the continent. This would be a complex matter but not insurmountable if the voluntary will to make the overall scheme work is there. With the credit crunch, that is just possible.

Loudest opponents

Clearly, the giant clubs have most to lose from the way a salary cap would make competition more equal and diminish, to whatever degree, their prospects of success. So of course they are the loudest opponents, just as they are the seemingly invincible winners from the current set-up where qualifying for the riches of the Champions League has become virtually self-perpetuating.

They might be more amenable to a compromise system proposed by Rummenigge of Bayern, where the level of wages is based on a percentage of revenue, say a figure of 60 per cent. Clubs with larger stadia and larger incomes would still be able to pay higher salaries to players.

A less convincing objection to the salary cap idea comes from critics who say it will result in corruption because clubs will try to cheat the system by making undeclared payments to players. This is a false and craven argument.

If football decides it wants to reduce costs, and/or that it wants to improve competitive balance, then it should not be dissuaded by the possibility of cheating. Rigorous and transparent accounting procedures can be set up, and strong punishments can be imposed to deter wrongdoing.

Will salary caps happen? Will Platini realise his dream?

In a swiftly changing world that is impossible to predict. Gareth Southgate, Middlesbrough's admirable young manager, is surely right when he says that salary caps would promote "better and tighter leagues". He is also wise enough to know that this truth is not attractive to everyone in the game, and certainly not to the richest and most powerful in Madrid, Manchester and Milan.●

"A voluntary scheme is certain to be required if a salary cap is to be introduced to European soccer"

Compromise scheme ...Rummenigge

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Tim Vickery

The trade in players from South America to Europe will continue to reap rich rewards as investors start their own clubs to control talent

Agents of change

THERE IS A new type of football club emerging in Brazil. They can boast gleaming facilities and wonderful training grounds but have little interest in acquiring supporters or challenging for major titles. These clubs are owned or administered by agents.

There is a basic contradiction at the heart of the contemporary South American game: the activity runs at a loss and the majority of clubs are strapped for cash, but the continent still produces some of the most valuable commodities in world football – fantastic players.

Agents and investment funds are working to control as much of this business chain as possible by overseeing the production, career administration and sale of players. But how can they circumvent the FIFA requirement that players' registrations must belong to clubs? Easy – they start a club.

Take the case of centre-back Henrique, capped by Brazil in 2008. He made his name the previous year with Coritiba as they won promotion back to the first division. Then he moved to Palmeiras, where he made a big impression, and was quickly snapped up by Barcelona, who loaned him to Bayer Leverkusen in Germany, where he has been attracting good reviews.

But the CBF, Brazil's FA, does not record the 22-year-old as having moved abroad from either Coritiba or Palmeiras. Instead this is registered as a transaction where Barcelona bought from Desportivo Brasil, a team which Henrique could never have played for at senior level for the simple reason the club only dispute championships at Under-15, 17 and 20 levels.

Desportivo Brasil were founded in November 2005 by Traffic, a sports marketing firm who are major players in South American TV rights. In 2008 Desportivo Brasil had 86 players registered with the CBF, of whom 56 were loaned to other clubs. In addition to Henrique, the club also sold players to Holland and Sweden.

When players produced by the club reach 20 they are often moved on to Ituano, where Traffic have a partnership deal giving them control over player sales. Last year Ituano sold players to Belgium, Japan, Kuwait, Lithuania, South Korea and Syria, as well as to Miami FC in the United States, another Traffic project.

Learning...Henrique (left) has done well on loan at Leverkusen

Plenty of registrations

Ability Sports is another marketing firm who have moved into the area, founding the Villa Rio club in April 2004. This is a tiny outfit, but it holds plenty of registrations of players loaned out to other, bigger clubs.

Last year Villa Rio moved players to Portugal, Argentina, Bolivia, China, Russia and South Korea.

Meanwhile, Tombense, a traditional club in Minas Gerais

Snapped up...president Joan Laporta welcomes new signing Henrique to Barcelona

"Today's generation have grown up with the global marketplace of footballers"

which in recent times has been administered by Brazil Soccer, a company of agent Eduardo Uram, last year sent players to Germany, Greece, Japan, Serbia, Spain and Portugal.

Supermarket chain Pao de Acucar set up teams in Rio and Sao Paulo, who sold players in 2008 to Germany, Holland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Drinks manufacturer Red Bull have recently started their own club.

Part of the impetus for this trend comes from the expectation that legislative changes will strengthen the position of the clubs which develop young talent.

At present, youngsters in Brazil can only turn professional at the age of 16, by which time (as was the case with Fabio and Rafael of Manchester United) they may have already come to the attention of European clubs. Currently under debate is a proposal whereby the youngster can receive a grant from 12 to 14, and can then sign a contract of youth development valid between the ages of 14 and 16. Any other club wanting his services will have to pay an amount 200 times that spent on his development.

And at present FIFA only recognises contracts of a three-year duration, with the consequence that the player can become a free agent at 19. Pressure is mounting to push FIFA to increase this to five years in the case of the first contract, thus tying the youngster to his development club until the age of 21. Some would even like to see this tie extend to 23.

If implemented, these changes will not take away the desire of youngsters

In the shop window...Ituana's Pierre (left)

Flogged at 15

Manchester United twins Fabio and Rafael are an example of the growing trend for Brazilian players to forsake senior football in their homeland

BACK IN 1994, in the first few games I attended in Brazil, I saw players such as Rivaldo, Roberto Carlos and Juninho Pernambucano, all of whom were well into their twenties when they went off to Europe.

Someone arriving in Brazil today would not be so lucky. Talent is whisked over the Atlantic at an ever younger age, a trend which has a number of explanations – legislative reasons, the fact that the European giants now count on global scouting networks, the weak position of the local clubs and the fact that for many of the new generation the dream has changed. They have grown up with the objective of starring for a top European side rather than a local club, and are anxious to move as soon as possible.

Excellent examples of the process are Manchester United's full-back twins, Fabio and Rafael da Silva (born July 9, 1990), who came to England without having played a senior game for Fluminense, the Rio club that groomed them.

They both showed promise in the Brazil side that won the South American Under-15 Championship in 2005, and also caught the eye playing for Fluminense in a youth tournament in Hong Kong. Arsenal and United were interested – but a phone call from Cristiano Ronaldo may have helped tip the balance.

United had got to the twins before they were 16, the age at which Brazilian legislation allows them to turn professional. So, unable to move until they reached 18, they signed for Fluminense in the knowledge their long-term future was in England. Since FIFA does not recognise contracts in excess of three years, Fluminense knew they were running a real risk of losing Fabio and Rafael without compensation when they reached 19. So they negotiated a deal with United, freeing the twins at 18 in return for a reported £1.2million which will rise to a maximum of £7m based on appearances and achievements.

Look and learn...Rafael and Fabio watch a United pre-season friendly

Fraught with danger

But although they have been acquired so cheaply, the deal does carry a risk from the United point of view. The step-up from junior to first-team player is huge and happens at a time when the youngster is going through all kinds of internal and external changes. It is a difficult transition for a player who is based in his home city, let alone one who has moved to a different country, with a strange language and unfamiliar culture. These early moves are fraught with the danger that the player's career may lose momentum.

In the case of Fabio and Rafael there are sound footballing reasons for United wanting to take them so soon. In Brazil full-backs are

for a quick move to Europe, since today's generation have grown up with the global marketplace of footballers.

Those who work with youth development in Brazil report that the players are increasingly anxious to move as soon as possible. They are used to instant solutions, and their dreams are now focused on Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Arsenal, Milan and Internazionale rather than the local big clubs.

But the suggested legislative tweaks might well stem the process whereby players are moving at an ever younger age. And they should also make youth development a more profitable activity. The agent-owned and administered clubs are well positioned to take advantage.

For all their millions of supporters, whether the established clubs are as well placed is more doubtful. There are some, such as Sao Paulo, Internacional, Cruzeiro and a few others, who are known for the quality of their youth development work and have invested heavily in their structure in this area. For some of the others, the immediate requirements put them in the hand of the agents. The clubs need players, the agents can supply them.

This, though, has two worrying consequences. The first is that the club provides the shop window, but it is the agent, the fund or the sports marketing company who benefit when the sale is made and the player moves abroad. And so the financial position of the club is not necessarily strengthened, and they remain just as dependent as before on the figure of the agent.

Integrity of the game

The second refers to the crucial point of the integrity of the domestic game. As Marcelo Damato writes in the sports daily *Lance!*: "The growing presence of investors [by which he means the agents, funds and marketing companies who are investing in players] shows that the clubs are increasingly weak. Before long the championships will be decided – even involuntarily – by the investors. They will maintain their player at club A while his value rises and sell their player at club B to improve their cash flow. And club A will be the champion."

Cross country runner...Fidel Martinez has been lured by Cruzeiro from Ecuador

A fund which illustrates another interesting trend is Grupo Sonda, whose core business is information technology. They operate all over South America and have used their continent-wide connections to bring players from other countries to Santos, where they have a partnership.

As the process of South American integration gathers pace, it is increasingly probable that Brazil will be trying to snap up talent from surrounding countries.

Indeed, Brazil complains about losing its youngsters to Europe, but it is just starting to do a similar thing to some of its neighbours. Cruzeiro, for example, have signed highly-rated Javier Reina, 20, from Colombia and 18-year-old Fidel Martinez from Ecuador.

With Brazilian football paying higher wages and offering more visibility and prospects of a move to Europe, this type of move could well be a trend to look for in the future of South American football. ●

Heading for the big time...indentical twins Fabio (left) and Rafael

often seen primarily as attackers, and the defensive side of their game can be neglected. By taking them so young United will hope to improve their all-round skills.

These differing interpretations of the full-back's role may help explain why Rafael, rather than his brother, has been quicker to make the breakthrough. Admittedly, the path to the first team has been more open for a right-back, Rafael's position, than the other flank, where Patrice Evra has been in fine form, while Fabio also had some injury problems. But it could be the case that it has been easier for Rafael to adapt because he plays at right-back, whereas Fabio has tended to play from left-back, roving forward and inside at will.

In Brazil there is no doubt that the latter is rated higher. Last year he captained Brazil's Under-17s, and in the South American Championship and the World Cup scored 10 goals, while Rafael managed just one.

Tim Vickery

TRENDSETTERS

Eight players who typify the way the game is heading

John BOSTOCK

Stockpiled talent

IN A PERFECT world precocious talent emerging from a lower-league side would stay with that club for a few years and learn their craft beyond the spotlight. Unfortunately, the reality is somewhat different. Instant gratification is the order of the day, and sensations such as England Under-17 attacking midfielder John Bostock, who controversially quit Crystal Palace for Premiership outfit Tottenham last year, are simply not prepared to wait.

Bostock – who attracted a big-money offer from Chelsea when he was 14 and became Palace's youngest-ever first-teamer in October 2007 at the age of 15 years and 287 days – clearly saw a five-season deal with Spurs as the chance of a lifetime and an offer he could not refuse. Palace, though, still scream blue murder about what happened to the player who turned 17 in January. They rated Bostock at £5million but, in July 2008, a Football League transfer tribunal awarded the selling club just £700,000, rising to a possible £1.25m with various add-ons.

Palace chairman Simon Jordan had a point when he suggested the verdict was a green light for big-hitting clubs to hoard cut-price youngsters.

"I feel mugged and brutalised. It's scandalous and sends out a message to smaller clubs," said Jordan. "Why bother to bring players through if tribunals do not reflect the work that has gone in? The FA wants to have the best national team, but if the best young talent sits in the reserves what chance do we have?"

Gokhan INLER

The *gastarbeiter* kid

THERE IS no question that Turkey has taken over from the former Yugoslavia as the most fertile of European footballing nurseries. In Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and elsewhere, the sons of *gastarbeiter*, Turkish immigrant parents, are breaking through in increasing numbers – and none is making a stronger impression at the moment than defensive midfielder Gokhan Inler, a 24-year-old who has performed remarkably for Udinese in Serie A since arriving from FC Zurich in the summer of 2007.

Born in the north-western Swiss town of Olten, "Gogi" was a slow starter during his time in the Basle youth team and rejected by Istanbul heavyweights Fenerbahce after a trial in 2004. But his career picked up with a move to Aarau a year later and he went on to figure in back-to-back Swiss championship triumphs with FC Zurich.

His dual-nationality could have posed a dilemma when deciding which flag to wrap himself in, but Inler – who made his international debut in 2006 – innocently says he chose Switzerland because they happened to ask him first.

Strong in the tackle, tactically disciplined and good on the ball, he was one of the few to impress during Switzerland's hugely disappointing Euro 2008 campaign and the word is that his days at Udinese are numbered, with the likes of Arsenal, Liverpool Juventus, Milan and Barcelona all ready and willing to meet the reported £9million asking price.

Nick Bidwell

Michael MANCIENNE

Second-tier international

THE SHOCK DECISION by England boss Fabio Capello to include the on-loan Wolverhampton Wanderers defender for the friendly with Germany last November prompted two types of response.

For some, the call-up of a 19-year-old who was playing in the Championship and had never set foot on a Premier League pitch, not to mention never having even made the first team of parent club Chelsea, was proof positive of the meritocracy Capello was creating. This, it was said, is proof that there would be no free rides in his squad.

Others, however, saw Mancienne's inclusion as a warning sign – an inevitable consequence of an excessive number of imported players in the English top-flight. With foreigners counting for over 60 per cent of players in the Premier League, the coach of England will have to look more and more to the second tier, it was claimed.

Mancienne – whose best position is centre-back, although he can perform at right-back, too – did not get off the bench in Berlin, yet he can only be satisfied with the way his career is progressing: caps from Under-16 to Under-21 levels, the Capello endorsement and impressive reviews for his performances in a Wolves side that are on track for promotion to the Premier League.

And to think that just two years ago the London-born defender, who turned 20 in January, rejected the chance to play for the Seychelles, the homeland of his father.

Stephane DALMAT

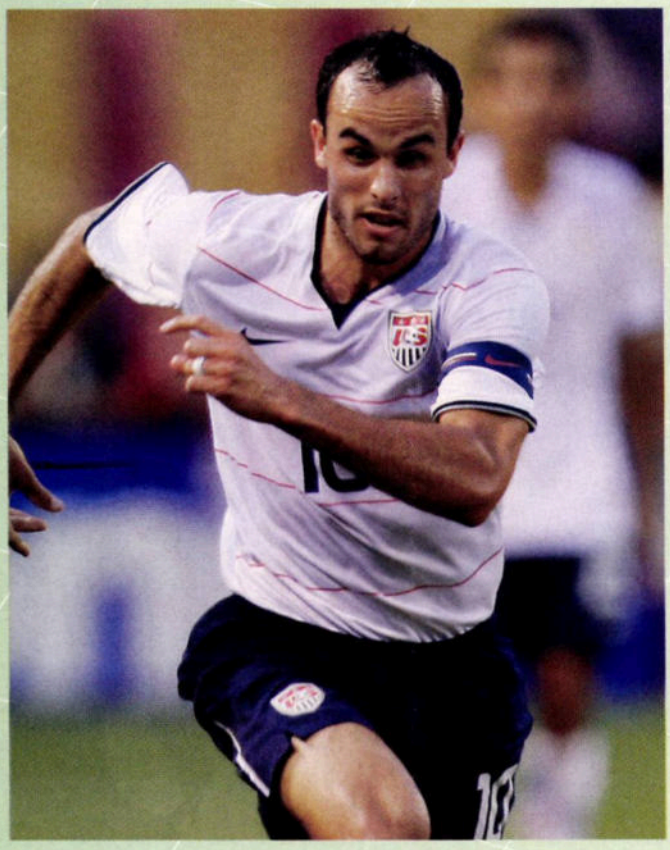
Son of Bosman

HAVE BOOTS, will travel. Such is the mantra of Sochaux attacking midfielder Dalmat, who in 11 years as a professional has turned underachievement and the quick exit into an art form. Wearing the colours of no fewer than 10 clubs, the 29-year-old's lengthy list of dissatisfied past employers includes Marseille, Paris Saint-Germain, Internazionale, Tottenham, Racing Santander in Spain and Bordeaux.

Yet it was all so different back in the summer of 1998 when the teenage Dalmat left Chateauroux for newly crowned French champions Lens in a blaze of positive headlines. Quick, dynamic and inventive on the left-flank, he was widely-touted as France's "next big thing", a sure-fire bet to develop into a full international. But for whatever reason – chronic inconsistency, bad attitude, fragile physique, incompatibility with certain coaches – he never lived up to the hype and found himself perpetually in transit.

Dalmat's career is a footballing Groundhog Day with virtually every season having an uncanny resemblance to the one before. A club would buy him, swear they had the key to unlock his potential, and then watch him reveal flashes of his talent before fading from view.

Back in 1963, French star Raymond Kopa caused a storm by complaining that players were slaves, tied to the one club for life. The meandering career of Stephane Dalmat shows just how far the pendulum has swung the other way.



Landon DONOVAN

The MLS loanee

LIKE HIS LA Galaxy co-star David Beckham – who, of course, is currently at Milan – the US international attacker has opted to spend the MLS off-season on loan in Europe, in his case with German giants Bayern Munich.

However, in contrast to Becks, Donovan has not crossed the Atlantic to maintain his fitness levels. After obtaining every possible American honour (five Player of the Year awards, 105 caps, and MLS titles in 2001 and 2003 with San Jose Earthquakes and in 2005 with Galaxy) the 26-year-old wants to prove himself on the old continent and sees his spell at Bayern as a two-and-a-half month trial in which he must convince.

As a teenager he played for the Bayer Leverkusen amateur side. Then, after a brilliant three years back in the US with San Jose, he returned to the Rhineland outfit in 2004 with high hopes, only to fail to adapt to the Bundesliga and swiftly retrace his steps to the MLS, where he joined Galaxy.

Bayern boss Jurgen Klinsmann is obviously a fan and insists Donovan's past European woes have no relevance today. "He was not able to fight his way into the Leverkusen side as a youngster, but he's a proven top player now, a big name in the American game with masses of experience," says Klinsmann.

"He's unbelievably quick and always looks to take on his man. He's a completely different sort of striker to the ones we already have. It gives me the chance to start the second half of the season with four top front men."

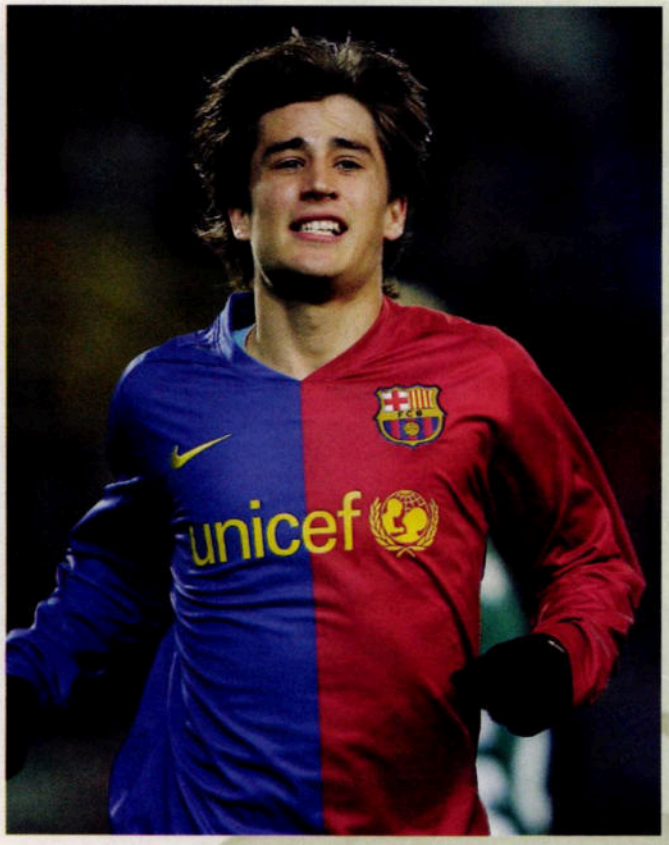
Saulius MIKOLIUNAS

Feeder-club fodder

A HALF-CENTURY ago, a Hearts side featuring the multi-talented likes of Dave Mackay, Alex Young, Alfie Conn snr and John Cumming was tartan from head to foot. Not any more though. Reflecting the globalisation of the game, the Edinburgh club is today awash with foreign imports – particularly Lithuanians, such as tricky winger Mikoliunas, who is just one of a substantial band of players to arrive recently from feeder club FBK Kaunas.

This is a trade route born of multiple ownership. Hearts chief shareholder, Russian-Lithuanian businessman Vladimir Ivanov, is also a backer of FBK and on acquiring the SPL side in 2005, he swiftly built his own East-West pipeline, through which flowed the cream of the Kaunas crop: Mikoliunas, striker Edgaras Jankauskas, attacker Andrius Velicka and defender Marius Zaliukas to name but a few. Note the absence of permanent deals; Mikoliunas, for example, has been on loan to Hearts for the past four years.

His quick feet, inventiveness and spirit have made him a cult hero for fans of the Jambos. But he does come with some less impressive items of baggage. He is prone to the occasional on-field disappearing act, has the shortest of fuses and displays a tendency to simulate fouls, such as when earning Lithuania an imaginary penalty in a Euro 2008 qualifier at Hampden Park last season. These days he is a player many Scottish fans love to hate and it was no surprise to hear him indicate that this season may be his last in the SPL.



BOJAN Krkic

The *cantera* sensation

IN MANY WAYS the brilliant teenage Barcelona striker could not go wrong. Bequeathed the expressive footballing genes of a Serbian father who once turned out for Red Star Belgrade before emigrating to Spain, Bojan was born and brought up in a Catalan region devoted to the round ball and impregnated with sound technical and tactical habits during a seven-year stint in Barcelona's La Masia academy.

Often kids who perform remarkably at *cantera* or junior level turn out to be the lost boys, unable to complete the journey to the professional ranks. But Bojan, the scorer of an incredible 889 goals for various young Barca teams was never going to fall by the wayside.

His five-goal contribution to Spain's triumph at the Under-17 European Championship in 2006 marked him out as special, and Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard simply had to make room for the prodigious marksman cum dribbler, despite the plethora of forward-line talent at his disposal. The first full cap which came his way last September was as inevitable as night following day.

At a time when many clubs believe the only way to achieve success is to buy ready-made stars, the priority Barca pay to their La Masia interns proves there is a viable alternative.

If you can produce a Bojan, Messi, Puyol, Xavi, Iniesta, Carrasco, Ferrer, current head coach Pep Guardiola and so many others, why go shopping for what you have lovingly and productively nurtured in-house?

Sergio AGUERO

Son (in law) of Maradona

THE FACT the Atletico Madrid and Argentina attacking starlet is engaged to Diego Maradona's daughter Giannina – the couple have a child on the way – is not Aguero's only link to *El Pibe d'Oro*. The pair are also uncannily similar in their playing style, upbringing and temperament.

Both legend and 20-year-old apprentice share a low centre of gravity, explosive pace and versatility, and are equally at home fashioning chances for others or finishing themselves with rare composure. Each had a shanty-town upbringing, with Aguero one of seven brothers and sisters hailing from the less than salubrious Don Bosco quarter of Quilmes to the south of Buenos Aires. And both favour a streetwise, urchin-like approach to the game. While Maradona had his "Hand of God" moment against England at the 1986 World Cup, Aguero did the same thing in October 2006 versus Recreativo Huelva.

Nicknamed "El Kun" because of his likeness to a character in a Japanese cartoon, Aguero was born to break records. While at Independiente he became the youngest player in the history of the Argentinian League at 15 years and 1 month, and his £19.1million move to Atletico in the summer of 2006 made him his country's most expensive transfer of all time.

And don't be surprised if he soon sets that particular bar even higher as it has been reported that Real Madrid, Internazionale, Chelsea and Manchester City are among those enamoured with his dazzling array of gifts.

The ailing fiefdom

FIFA needs to reinvent itself if it wants to remain relevant as the governing body at the top of the modern game

A decade of power...Blatter is FIFA's eighth president

SEPP BLATTER is a relic of another time, an anachronism. Not Blatter the individual, who is by turn agile politician, personable socialite, smooth-talking head of state, tireless administrator and ruthless commander, but Blatter the president, who is a product of the 1970s, when he joined a FIFA being fashioned in the image of the dictatorial, iron-fisted president Joao Havelange.

The world has changed, the world of sport has changed and the world of business administration has changed.

FIFA, post-Blatter, will need a massive re-evaluation of what it does, why it does it and how it does it. And that is some challenge for the next president, whoever he may be and whenever he may be elected.

The histories of empires, nations, governments, corporations and – yes – sports authorities are littered with the stained reputations of those who attained power and, either through their own efforts or through others' acquiescence, retained it for too long.

And because they went beyond their time they ended up blocking the path of political and structural

Keir Radnedge

"FIFA, post-Blatter, will need a massive rethink of what it does, why it does it and how it does it"

evolution. This is the danger to FIFA if Blatter stays too long. It is also the danger to what he may perceive as his own legacy.

An employee since 1976, latterly as general secretary AND chief executive, Blatter stood for the presidency in 1998 when even the notoriously insensitive Havelange finally realised he had outstayed his welcome.

Blatter told me then that a FIFA president should only serve a maximum of two terms. But when his two terms were almost up (and he had gained a year through shifting elections, sensibly, to a post-World Cup year) he stood again in 2007.

Voting support

When I asked Blatter his reason for seeking a third term he said he had underestimated the time an elected president needed to devote to shoring up his voting support.

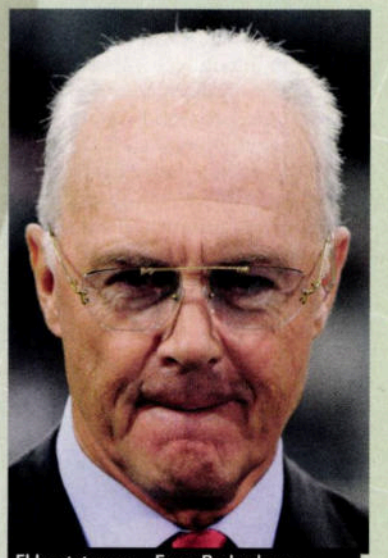
He even suggested that FIFA might consider copying the presidential system recently put in place by the International Olympic Committee, whereby a president serves a first term of eight years and, if re-elected, a final second spell of four years. The IOC had learned to its own cost the damage of being under the command of one man for too long, first the outdated reactionary Avery Brundage, then the politically-compromised Juan Antonio Samaranch.

Modern business practice all around the world is moving towards a greater clarity and transparency. Hiding away in Switzerland has its advantages for fiefdoms such as FIFA (and UEFA, for that matter) but having Swiss headquarters also carries a certain stigma of secrecy. That very secrecy, of course, carries with it the stigma of suspicion.

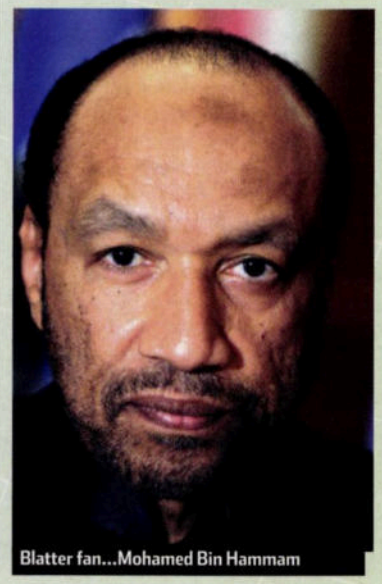
Blatter, health permitting, will probably stand again for the presidency in 2011. After all, leading FIFA from one post or another has been his life for almost 30 years.

Also, he is developing what he sees as his greatest project – establishing football as not merely a popular, worldwide sport but as a cultural entity which can go where governments and mere "ordinary" politicians fear to tread – cutting across borders and cultures as well as racial

Euro choice...Michel Platini



Elder statesman...Franz Beckenbauer



Blatter fan...Mohamed Bin Hammam

and political divides. That project will be work in progress come 2011 and, in the wake of having taken the World Cup to Africa for the first time, Blatter should continue to appear unassailable.

But after 2015? Perhaps a new president whose identity is beyond identification right now.

Would Michel Platini want it, after leading UEFA? It is likely his Euro-weighted credentials would deny him worldwide support.

Franz Beckenbauer? At the age of 70 in 2015, too old.

Mohamed Bin Hammam, a noted Blatter-backer? He has enough to contend with in Asia and would lack worldwide support, with the Blatter connection being perhaps even a liability by then.

Whoever he is, the new man will need a new broom. He will need to bring FIFA's administration into a transparent new world; a world where salaries, expenses and tax returns are open to inspection. The sort of world where both sporting credibility and commercial trust can reign supreme.

The way forward

Perhaps, therefore, the way forward is to scrap the administratively outdated system of an elected president who is also chief executive. UEFA had the right idea under Lennart Johansson, though it might be said that, ultimately, Gerhard Aigner and Lars-Christer Olsson were the wrong men for the chief-executive role, and that permitted Platini to take a step back and revisit the role of presidential commander-in-chief.

Let there be no doubt: if FIFA does not open the doors (and windows) to full accountability, both commercially and administratively, then it will forfeit its right to run the world game.

The continental confederations are growing stronger and national associations are increasingly at the mercy of their leagues and clubs. Thus the old pyramid is starting to tremble. And if it trembles too violently, the FIFA executive and the president at its apex will topple.

FIFA and its next president, whoever that may be, must move with the times or be left behind.●

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE will have to change to remain meaningful. And that means far more than the downward change being introduced by UEFA president Michel Platini as a gesture of thanks towards the middle-division nations who voted him into presidential office.

Champions League action...is something missing?

When does the Champions League come alive? Not in the group stage, that boring procession of predictable results which will become even more predictable when more weak clubs are allowed in from next season.

Only in the spring does the "world's most prestigious club competition" burst into life.

When UEFA last reorganised the UEFA Cup, the then chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson said that it would stand or fall not by the commercially driven insertion of a group stage but by its success as a sporting competition. That is why it has had to be changed again.

Similarly, the group stage of the Champions League is a sporting failure, with too many dead games in the closing two rounds and the guarantee that, as weaker clubs are admitted, so the tally of dead games will grow.

Television companies will not tolerate uncompetitive football in prime-time slots much longer. Hence UEFA needs a new formula to answer the sporting challenge, the clubs' demands and UEFA's own commercial demands. The Champions League may lay golden eggs for the European federation, but just as the original European Cup had to evolve out of the direct knockout era so the Champions League needs to evolve.

A European league? The pipe dream everyone thought could never happen? One day it will. Like it or not, it's the only way to go.

HOST NATIONS

Joint venture...Poland and Ukraine will co-host Euro 2012

IT'S CLEAR that FIFA and UEFA are running out of options. The more they expand the finals of their great tournaments, such as the World Cup and European Championship, the more they reduce the number of countries who are actually capable of hosting these extravaganzas.

International federations want to choose their host countries further and further in advance for two reasons. The first reason is because logistical, technological and financial demands are now so gargantuan that countries need between seven and 10 years to get their acts together.

The second reason is that all international federations are growing increasingly worried that some round-the-corner magic via the worldwide web will undermine the nonsensical rights fees currently being paid by television companies.

Co-hosting is hugely expensive. As Sepp Blatter himself said, after FIFA took the World Cup to Japan and South Korea in 2002: "It's the financial equivalent of organising two World Cups simultaneously."

UEFA's imprisoned confusion over the decision to go to Poland and Ukraine in 2012 is further evidence of the dangers implicit in voting for co-hosting. But it's the only answer. Expect more, not less.

Keir Radnedge

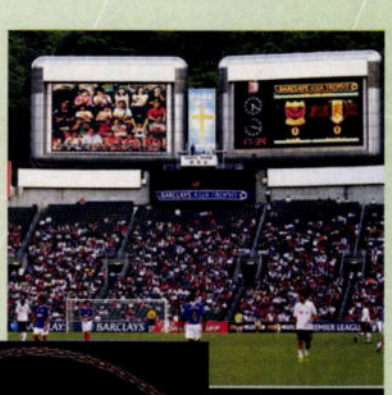
Disgraced...German referee Robert Hoyzer admitted fixing matches

THE 39TH STEP

IMPOSSIBLE, SAYS SIR Alex Ferguson. No national domestic league, not even the so-popular Premier, will take a round of matches abroad, he says. Not this year, not next year, nor the year after.

But other sports can do it, as American football has proved at Wembley, in the heart of Premierland. If the price is right then the clubs will go, another federation will happily claim hosting rights and the international confederations will joyously bank their tasty slice of the financial cake.

It's no longer a question of if, merely when.



Worldwide appeal...Premier teams playing in Hong Kong (above) and American football at Wembley (left)

MATCH FIXING

BEWARE: MATCH FIXING will grow to be the scourge of football's credibility over the next decade.

The vast majority of professional footballers around the world can only dream of making the sort of money they see being splashed out to the likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Cristiano Ronaldo. That same vast majority can also only dream of even a glance at the pot of gold at the end of western Europe's rainbow.

But the impossibility of policing all the betting traffic out on the internet also means that the vast majority of players way beyond UEFA's golden triangle can see a way to augment their income through acquiescing with the gambling industry.

Match fixing is easier to spot with the latest, sophisticated monitoring systems. But spotting the first throw-in, the second corner, the third yellow card and the rest of the fixed-odds infinity is impossible unless someone owns up. And that is unlikely; not only because of the financial implications, but because too often the reward for metaphorically blowing the whistle is being frozen out of the mainstream.

After all, that was the fate of Jacques Glassman, who exposed the notorious Marseille match fix in 1993.

Barca's boy...Messi

CLUB v COUNTRY

SO ARGENTINA WANT to take Leo Messi to the Olympics? Fine. Barcelona can agree as long as Argentina do not pick him for any friendly matches of which they do not approve.

So England want Steven Gerrard in midfield? Fine. Liverpool can agree as long as England's needs do not clash with the surgery schedule Liverpool have laid down.

So FIFA wants the best players at the World Cup finals? Fine. As long as they are all insured by FIFA.

So UEFA wants all its headline names at the Euro Championship? Fine. As long as the clubs are paid compensation per player per day.

Once the national associations held all the power. But over the next decade the truth will out: the power has been seized by the leagues and by the clubs.

The clubs will still hire out their players for World Cups and regional championships as these are where their presence and performances increase their value – to their clubs.

Club v Country? It's a walkover.

Freedom fighter

The future looks brighter for recovering alcoholic Jean-Marc Bosman, the player whose actions changed the course of football history in the 1990s. But as Leander Schaerlaeckens discovers, Bosman believes player power could be on the wane

AFTER PICKING ME up from the station in his little sports car, Jean-Marc Bosman, now 44, welcomes me into his modest light-brick house in a small southern Belgian town. I detect no trace of the sullen, sad man, continually sipping from tall drinks, that previous interviewers described. Nor do I find evidence of a football career for that matter. Rather, Bosman is very polite and outgoing and no longer bloated or portly.

He looks well-groomed and in good shape, sporting the black T-shirt his nascent company sells and a pair of stone-washed jeans. He pours us both a glass of Coke Light as we sit down at his kitchen table. "This is my new alcohol," he blurts out, flashing a wide smile.

Jean-Marc Bosman is in a good place now. Following sustained bouts of alcoholism, severe depression, a divorce and suicidal whispers in his head – caused by the strain of his monumental and eponymous ruling that emancipated professional footballers in 1995 – he has pulled himself together. He lives with his new partner, Carine, his 19-year old daughter, Manon, and Carine's daughter, Julie, 12. They are expecting a child of their own in the spring. Bosman is chuffed.

With them lives a burly black labrador with a gimp hind paw. Like Bosman, it wears a very visible scar from events past but is brimming with energy. Bosman's scar is on the back of his head. In September 2007, his drinking had reached such a level that one morning he simply collapsed, smashed his head on the floor and had a spontaneous epileptic attack. Carine, whom he had met two years earlier in the pizzeria where she works, found him in a pool of blood on the tiles next to the bar in his kitchen. Bosman was taken to hospital where the severity of his alcoholism was discovered. He was not far from drinking himself to death.

Ironically it was football that saved his life. If he had not been in good shape by virtue of a career as a professional athlete, he most likely would not have survived the epileptic episode on his kitchen floor, nor the two attacks that followed in the ambulance and at the hospital, where his heart rate was measured at 196 beats per minute.

Full recovery

One of the first things Bosman shows me, with no small amount of pride, are his medical records. They show that he has made a full recovery from the damage he did to his liver. As evidenced by the tests, Bosman has his life back on track. His mental and physical health are up to par for the first time since the late 1980s, before the transfer ordeal began.

But he faces another challenge now: the money is about to run out. In fact, he is in debt. The case left him with about £800,000 in contributions towards his legal bills, damages and acts of gratitude from players. But all that remains is a £95,000 debt resulting from a 10-year dispute with the state about taxes, which he is still paying off. With the money he did get, he built two houses, one of which he lives in and the other he rents out to his sister for next to nothing. The remaining funds have been his only source of income for the last decade, as he has never been able to collect unemployment benefits.

Bosman may be broke – he sank his last bit of cash into his new T-shirt line – but he is happy. It has often been the other way around. He is not so optimistic about the game of football though. FIFA has been on a lengthy and shoddily veiled campaign to roll back his ruling – Bosman is convinced of it.

"This six plus five business would be a disaster," he says animatedly, before I even ask him a question, referring to FIFA president Sepp Blatter's plan to limit the number of non-assimilated foreigners clubs can field at the start of a match to five.

The banishing of foreigner clauses was one of the key effects of the Bosman ruling. The year that he liberated the footballer was the same year his own career ended. He was 32. He was the last player who did not get to benefit from his own victory.

"In 1995 the Bosman ruling was there," he says. "There's total freedom for the player. They can

break contract any time as employees and leave. They had to pay a penalty but that was it. I won them that."

But new dangers lurk on the horizon. "The six plus five rule would create a big problem for every English club because salaries would sky-rocket again because English players would become much more expensive," Bosman says. "On the other hand the foreigners are in trouble and many of them will become superfluous.

"Standard Liege were able to balance their budget for the year by selling [Belgium midfielder Marouane] Fellaini to Everton for 18million euros [£15m]," Bosman continues. "They couldn't have done that without the Bosman ruling, they already have so many foreigners at Everton. He wouldn't have fitted into the [old] three plus two [foreigner] scheme. It would be a disaster in England, not just for the clubs, but for all the foreigners too. It would be even worse in smaller countries like Belgium. We're a country of 10 million, where are we going to find all those national players? Players would never leave any more.

"The six plus five rule will be a big problem for English clubs"

"I'm warning the players now – we need to stand up against six plus five," Bosman says as he jumps up, animatedly flailing his arms to emphasise his point. "Think hard. Players need to act and not always let themselves be pushed around."

The European Union agrees with him. Although FIFA has approved it internally, the EU has deemed the

One man and his dog...Bosman has turned his life around after the trials and tribulations that came with being a football pioneer

six plus five proposal illegal several times. The European Parliament formally rejected it last May as the rules violate the European Community Treaty, Article 39, which guarantees the free movement of EC workers within the Community, and indeed the Bosman Ruling. "[The] six plus five rule is based on direct discrimination on the grounds of nationality, and is thus against one of the fundamental principles of EU law," the European Commission stated last November.

That has not stopped Blatter and FIFA from trying to convince the EU to recognise football as an exceptional industry in which ordinary labour laws should not apply.

"We're employees," Bosman counters. "They always try to circumvent that. Football is not an exception to employment laws. It's an economic activity, and clubs are run like businesses and players are treated like employees. UEFA and FIFA don't understand that and keep trying to circumvent that. We're workers, that's what the Bosman ruling recognised."

"I fought the good fight and I paid the price"

Part of the Bosman ruling has already fallen into disrepair.

"The [governing bodies] are trying to take back power. If we're not careful, it'll be even worse than in 1995 by 2010 [when six plus five is supposed to go into effect]," Bosman says. "It'll be worse than the dark ages. They're putting everything back into place as if there never was a Bosman.

"From 1995 to 2000, Karel van Miert, the European Commissioner [for competition] gave nothing away to UEFA or FIFA – absolutely nothing.

"The Bosman ruling was followed to the letter. The problem is that in 2000 he was succeeded by Mario Monti, who wrapped up every single sports file."

That left FIFA to regulate players' contract buyouts on its own. "So already part of the Bosman arrest is out the window," a visibly disgusted Bosman comments. French defender Philippe Mexes felt the wrath of Monti's move. In 2004, when he bought out his contract with Auxerre, FIFA decided that the buyout would cost him £6m. Mexes was also slapped with a six-week suspension. His agent was banned for six months.

Still in gear...Bosman at a charity match in Hamburg last September

Transfer deal...Sepp Blatter and European Commissioner Mario Monti

More reasonable rules

FIFA has since implemented more reasonable buyout rules. Scottish defender Andy Webster became the first benefactor when he was allowed to leave Hearts for Wigan Athletic. FIFA ordered him to compensate his former club with £625,000 but the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) reduced this to £150,000.

"But it's FIFA that decides the terms of buyouts," Bosman reiterates. "Sepp Blatter called Cristiano Ronaldo a 'modern slave' but that's of Blatter's own doing. When there's a contract dispute, FIFA sets the buyout fee which a player then takes to CAS. But players give up and don't bother going

because the buying club can never afford the astronomical sum for the buyout and FIFA knows it. So few players can force their freedom. The Cristiano Ronaldo case showed that. Footballers can't change employers like all other citizens. FIFA makes these rules but it is a prisoner to clubs who often control the national federations who appoint the FIFA directors, and Mr Blatter. All that's left [of the Bosman ruling] are the nationality clauses."

There has been progress too, though. David Beckham and Landon Donovan of Los Angeles Galaxy were allowed to join Milan and Bayern Munich respectively on loan during the American off-season, thus being allowed to play for two clubs at the same time.

"It's a freedom of sorts," Bosman concedes. "But there are still agreements between clubs. They are still transfers. And if they can do it for them, why not for everybody?"

Bosman agrees with UEFA president Michel Platini that the minimum age for transfers abroad should be raised from 16 to 18, in spite of the EU's condemnation. "The minimum transfer age should stay at 16 within countries," he says. "I'm less for going abroad [at that age] because parents want to cash in. There shouldn't be a transfer to begin with, though."

But while the impact of the ruling on football was and still is enormous, it pales in comparison to its impact on Bosman himself. "At first people were saying what a good job I'd done but then they started saying bad things," he says. "So I got depressed. I started drinking more and more and more. In the end I just stayed at home, sitting [in my kitchen] drinking wine and beer. I stopped doing anything.

"It was bad depression. It probably started back in 1990. I should have been on antidepressants much earlier but I never took them. I wasn't put on them until I started being treated for my alcoholism."

For much of the time during his five years in court he was penniless, living in his mother's garage after his first wife had left him, and training for his comeback in solitude.

That didn't bother him much. Born from a poor Slovenian family, he had grown up with little luxury. His grandfather had come to Belgium to work in the mines. In 1940, his grandparents and their four children were deported to a Nazi work camp. Miraculously they all survived and were reunited. The lack of recognition, however, did nag at the proud Bosman. "People know there was a Bosman ruling but they don't realise there's a guy there who's given everything, who became an alcoholic," he says. "I thought everyone had forgotten me and left me hanging. I was just drinking to finish myself off."

Bosman finally stopped drinking on December 27, 2007 and has not touched a drop of alcohol since.

Bit of gratitude

All Bosman is after now is that little bit of gratitude. "[Footballers] make lots of money now, good for them. But I'm proud. I'd like to be recognised," he says. He hopes the players will buy his T-shirts in recognition of him and wear them as a symbol of the freedom he won them.

"Players are never at the unemployment office thanks to me. By wearing this T-shirt they're saying that they won't accept their freedoms being taken away. That they won't accept being hit in the wallet.

"I'm not demanding money but we're having a baby. I need money. I'm broke.

"I fought the good fight and I've paid the price. I just want to be recognised, that's what I'm really lacking. And I don't want to have lost 12 years of my life for everything to go back to the way it was."

Why did he not become an agent? "My job was to tell the players they could be free. Was I going to make money from them through the transfers I worked to get rid of?" Bosman asks. "I couldn't." Rather, his next projects are to quit smoking and wean himself off the antidepressants and, of course, raise a second child and build his company.

Bosman used to have two Porsches but he has had to sell them. He will have to get rid of his little sports car soon, too, but he doesn't care. "I could drive a donkey cart tomorrow and I wouldn't care," he says. "I have a beautiful family, I'm happy and that's all that matters."

His historic ruling may yet crumble but Jean-Marc Bosman has moved on. Almost two decades on, he is whole again.

● *For more information about Bosman's T-shirt business, visit www.jean-marc-bosman.com*

BOSMAN'S BATTLE

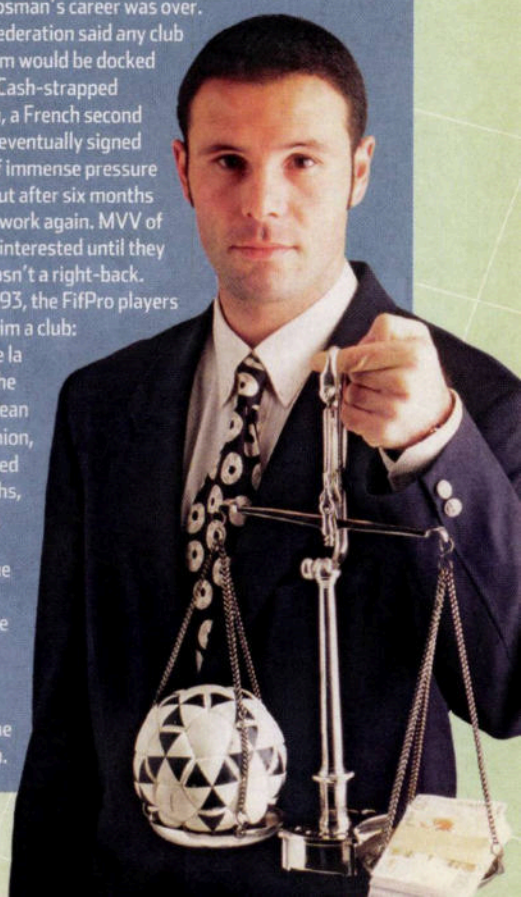
Early days...Bosman at Standard

Jean-Marc Bosman's long legal battle had started when his club RFC Liege refused to let him leave for Dunkerque in France after the 1989-90 season, when his contract had expired. At 25, the midfielder's career was flourishing, having begun at Standard Liege. RFC Liege slashed his wages to a quarter of the £2,000 he'd been making monthly regardless. Dunkerque were offering about £6,000 a month but couldn't (or didn't want to – opinions differ) pay a hefty transfer fee, so Liege killed the deal.

Bosman went to court and won. Liege and the Belgian federation appealed but Bosman won again and then a third time in 1995 – despite low funds and constant intimidation from his opponents – when Liege, the federation and UEFA appealed to the European Court of Justice. Henceforth players were free to leave clubs once their contracts had expired, free to buy out their contracts and European clubs could sign and play as many EU players as they fancied.

By now Bosman's career was over. The Belgian federation said any club that signed him would be docked three points. Cash-strapped Saint Quentin, a French second division club, eventually signed him in spite of immense pressure from Liege. But after six months he was out of work again. MVV of Holland were interested until they realised he wasn't a right-back.

In early 1993, the FifPro players union found him a club: Saint Denis de la Reunion, on the tiny Indian Ocean island of Reunion, where he played for nine months, before joining Olympique Charleroi in the Belgian third division for the 1993-94 season. His career ended with Vise in the fourth division.



A work in progress

Indian football is a sleeping giant that is gradually waking up

A SLEEPING GIANT is what Sepp Blatter calls it. Awake but brain dead is how India skipper Bhaichung Bhutia once referred to it. Neither comment is entirely accurate – generalisations rarely are – but both are important in the story of Indian football.

The story began back in the 19th century when the British called play and the big ball hasn't stopped bouncing since. The emergence of a new power centre in the west of the country; the north-eastern state of Manipur becoming a football factory; India stunning the UAE in a World Cup qualifier and making the 2011 Asian Cup finals – all are signs that this Rip Van Winkle has occasionally blinked.

Calcutta, British India's capital until 1911, is where it started. The Indian Football Association, which is still in charge of the sport in West Bengal, predates the All India Football Federation (AIFF) by 43 years. For decades an aspiring footballer wasn't deemed to have arrived until he played for Mohun Bagan, East Bengal or Mohammedan Sporting. The Calcutta League rocked when most of the world was still only getting the hang of organised football.

Around 2001, when it was renamed Kolkata, the city's grip on football loosened. The National League, India's first dalliance with home-and-away football in 1996, altered the season which until then comprised national tournaments and local leagues. JCT, from Punjab, won the first National League and Salgaocar gave notice Goa was finally taking its football seriously by winning the third.

As traditional tournaments such as the Durand Cup, third oldest in the world, the IFA Shield and the Rovers Cup lost sheen or died, Mohammedan Sporting flitted in and out of the top tier, but Mohun Bagan and East Bengal made up for a bad start, winning six of the first nine National League titles between them. Then came Dempo, also from Goa.

Their first National League title in 2004-05 was dedicated to Cristiano Junior, a Brazilian striker who died of heart failure even as he scored in the Final of the Federation Cup, the Indian equivalent of the FA Cup, on December 4, 2004. Dempo have since been

Bye bye Bayern...young fans can't wait to get a look in at Oliver Kahn's farewell match against Mohun Bagan in Kolkata

Jump to it...but Bhutia failed to impress in England

DHIMAN SARKAR in Kolkata

"Dempo's first national title was dedicated to a Brazilian"

India's best three times and Mahindra United, a Mumbai team which likes to think of itself as India's Red Devils, once – proof that the century-old unipolar power structure of Indian football may be making way for a new order.

In terms of history and achievement, though, it will take some doing to overhaul Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. Their rivalry is over 80 years old and is among the world's top derbies as listed by *World Soccer* (July 2008).

Asia's oldest club, Mohun Bagan, originated in north Kolkata in 1889 and their coming of age led to a surge of self-belief in a country seeking freedom as the team, with 10 barefoot players, beat East Yorkshire Regiment 2-1 on July 29, 1911 to win the IFA Shield, the first time an Indian team had done so.

Born much later, in 1920 and out of disgruntlement at Mohun Bagan, East Bengal gave those migrating from what is now Bangladesh a sense of identity. Beating Iran's Pas in the IFA Shield Final, they became the first Indian team post-Independence to record

The future of football

Barefoot in the park...Kolkata boys enjoy an impromptu game in traditional style

a win over foreign competition en route to silverware in that tournament.

Even in the time of dwindling attendances, the Mohun Bagan-East Bengal Federation Cup semi-final in 1997 drew a record crowd of 131,000, at least 20,000 more than the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata should properly hold. Brief periods aside, their battle for supremacy has defined Indian football.

Even though India's international profile slipped in the 1970s, the country having missed the sport's transformation into a megabuck industry, domestic football had an audience until the mid 1980s.

Television changed all that. Pele's New York Cosmos drew 2-2 with Mohun Bagan in 1977 and Diego Maradona came calling in December 2008 to spillover crowds with their roots in the broadcast of the 1986 World Cup finals. That was India's first live exposure to the month-long extravaganza. It didn't need a second invitation.

That winning feeling...India celebrate the AFC Challenge Cup triumph over Tajikistan and a place in the Asian Cup finals

"Urban India follows David Beckham's every move"

Cable television started to beam international football regularly from the early 1990s. The easy availability of top-drawer stuff, both club and country versions, turned audiences from the home-made product. By then, India had also won the 1983 cricket World Cup, meaning the sport was no longer regarded as a leisurely winter activity enjoyed by the middle and upper classes. Capitalising on the inertia of other sport, cricket wooed commerce and, inflated by television money, easily won the battle for viewers.

But as domestic football's popularity diminishes, the audience for international football continues to grow. Urban India follows David Beckham's every move and the fortunes of Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Barcelona or Real Madrid – and that is a reality this country of a billion people is learning to live with.

What would have happened had Bhutia graduated from Bury to the upper reaches of

Bitter rivals...East Bengal's Jackson Aqaypong hurdles Jose Barretto of Mohun Bagan in a typical crunch match

English football or had his passage to England paved the way for others? Well, the giant would have left for work by now. It hasn't and international interest in India, more to do with economics than it being an exotic destination, is a recent development. Why else would it take a FIFA president until 2007 for a first visit to the world's largest democracy and a member since 1948? It is no coincidence that Bayern Munich organised Oliver Kahn's farewell match in Kolkata last May – a month before Everton inked a knowledge-sharing deal with IFA – and sent Karl-Heinz Rummenigge in November for discussions over an academy in West Bengal.

Curiosity also led Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon to Goa and New Delhi three times in 2008, and to the International Football Arena discussing India at its annual seminar at FIFA House in November.

Things have also moved on the football front over the past four years, which explains the interest in a country that has broken into the FIFA top-100 only once since the rankings were introduced. Now 71 years old, the AIFF turned professional in 2005 when it also signed a 10-year marketing contract with TV company Zee Sports worth about £33million.

Last year, the National League was renamed the I-League. Clubs must now employ licensed coaches and become commercial entities. The league is composed of 12 clubs but there are plans to increase it to 16 by 2012. It doesn't have a pan-India appeal yet. There is no representation from the southern states which used to be the supply line in the way Manipur – despite problems of insurgency, HIV and drugs – is now.

Also in 2007, India, under former Malmo coach Bob Houghton, won the Jawaharlal Nehru Gold Cup, an international tournament revived after a decade. Held in New Delhi, India beat Syria 1-0 in the Final on August 29, their first title since the LG Cup in Vietnam in 2002 and the third in 36 years. It was watched by a sell-out crowd of 30,000 while around 10,000 milled outside.

The following August, the Ambedkar Stadium again proved lucky as the Final of the AFC Challenge Cup had to be shifted from Hyderabad because of rain. Sunil Chhetri, who Houghton feels should try his luck in Europe, scored the first hat-trick by an Indian in a Final as India beat Tajikistan 4-1, earning the right to play in the Asian Cup finals for the first time since 1984.

India's finest tango with the beautiful game occurred in the 1950s and 1960s under coach Syed Rahim, who was also a qualified referee and physical instructor. They spurned an invitation to play in the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, ostensibly because of travel costs, but also because they didn't want to play in boots. But they won the Asian Games gold in 1951 and were the first from the continent to reach the Olympic semi-finals, in 1956. The good times continued when India ran Ferenc Puskas' Hungary close in the Rome Olympics, won the Asian Games again in 1962 and were runners-up in the Asian Cup in 1964.

After a long drought, the current decade has again proved productive. At club level, East Bengal took the ASEAN Cup in 2003, beating Asian Champions League runners-up BEC Terro Sasana of Thailand. At international level, a goal from trained priest Jules Alberto stung Henri Michel's UAE in a 2002 World Cup qualifier in Bangalore. New club sides have appeared, but the old ones aren't entirely irrelevant yet.

Infrastructure is still a problem, youth development is in its infancy and the AIFF has yet to build its own training centre. But the silver lining is that, for the first time, India seems like a work in progress.

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Mohun Bagan, East Bengal, Churchill Brothers ...a guide to the top-division teams

1 CHURCHILL BROTHERS
India's only family club is run by the Alemao brothers, of whom Churchill Alemao has been a Chief Minister of Goa while brother Joaquim Alemao is an MP. Have come long way from playing village tournaments to finishing second in the National League in 1996-97 and the I-League last season. Brothers have had run-ins with the football establishment but, more often, their squad of young players, led by Nigerian captain Okolie Odafa, have let their football do the talking.

2 SPORTING CLUBE DE GOA
When Hotel Cidade de Goa disbanded, businessman Peter Vaz stepped in, the new club won the league title and they haven't looked back since. Current I-League leaders, the club has previously finished second in the National League and Federation Cup. Current coach Vishwas Gaonkar has revived the team after a slump last season. Nigerian Clifford Chukwuma was in charge the last time Sporting Clube had their most consistent run.

3 VASCO SPORTS CLUB
At 57, well into middle-age and, in the context of the I-League, it is showing. Play in black and white colours like their more famous Brazilian counterparts but, barring runners-up spots in the 1966 and 1972 Rovers Cup, they haven't flourished on the national scene. Back in the top tier after three seasons.

4 DEMPO SPORTS CLUB
Reigning champions, the club has been on a roll since 2004. Owned by a business group with interests in iron ore, shipbuilding and exports, Dempo became first Indian team to reach the semi-finals of AFC Cup in October. Coached by Armando Colaco, they will play in the qualifiers of the revamped Asian Champions League. In a country where one-year contracts are common, they have succeeded in retaining most of the title-winning squad.

5 MAHINDRA UNITED
Have been around for 56 years but changed their name from Mahindra & Mahindra SC in 2000 and switched from orange to a red strip. Having helped the development of organised football in Maharashtra, they came close to making the AFC Cup semi-finals in 2007. Have won everything Indian football has to offer since 2000, but this season they have been in the news more for the transfer tug-of-war over national team players Steven Dias and N P Pradeep.

6 AIR INDIA
No high-fliers, this Mumbai team are more mid-table survivors. However, coach Bimal Ghosh has groomed more players for the national side than he would care to remember, with Steven Dias being the latest. Being a public sector unit, the club hasn't been able to fulfil licensing requirements – which is one reason why India weren't allowed any finals berths in new Asian Champions League.

7 MUMBAI FC
The baby of the I-League and backed by a business group that owns the League's marketing rights. Just 18 months old, they began life in the top tier with a bang, beating Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mahindra United. Coached by Englishman David Booth, who steered Mahindra United to the Federation Cup in 2003.

8 JCT
Owned by Jagatjit Cotton Mills and north India's only representatives. Formed in 1971, they won the National League in 1996-97 with a squad that was a who's who of Indian football. Coach Sukhwinder Singh has worked with the national team and been associated with the club for 11 editions of the National League and two I-Leagues. Like Dempo, the club bring through local players, quite a few of whom have caught national coach Bob Houghton's eye.

9 MOHUN BAGAN
Have been National League champions three times and are winners of nearly every Indian tournament many times over in their 119-year history. The Government of India issued a first-day cover when the club celebrated its centenary. Legends of Indian football such as Gostho Pal, Sailen Manna, Subimal "Chuni" Goswami, Jarnail Singh and Peter Thangaraj have all worn their green-and-maroon colours. Broke with the tradition of playing only Indians during 1980s. Talismanic Brazilian Jose Barreto and India skipper Bhaichung Bhutia spearhead the current attack under Moroccan coach Karim Bencerifa.

10 EAST BENGAL
Also three-times National League champions and the only club to win back-to-back titles. Came to prominence after winning the Calcutta League in 1942 and, with Mohun Bagan, form India's most enduring rivalry. Former India star P K Banerjee guided them to five straight Calcutta League crowns, during which time they beat Mohun Bagan 5-0 in 1975 IFA Shield final. In 2003 beat Thailand's BEC Terro Sasana 3-1 to win ASEAN Cup in Jakarta.

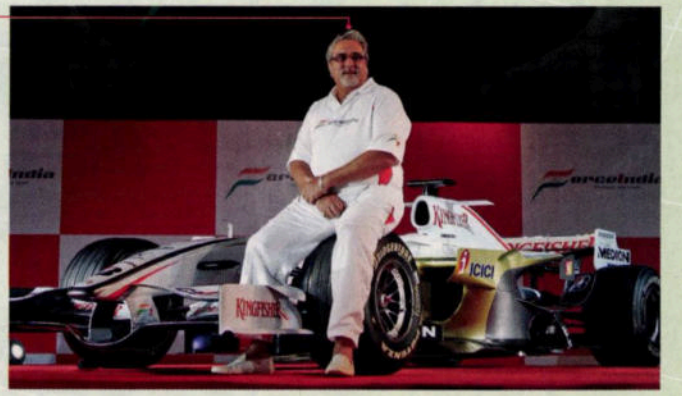
11 MOHAMMEDAN SPORTING
Rich in history but ailing at present . Five straight Calcutta League crowns in pre-Independent India (1934-38), the black-and-whites became the second Indian team to win the Durand Cup and took the IFA Shield in 1941 and 1942. Currently without a sponsor and beset by charges of irregular payments, I-League survival is the main aim at present.

12 CHIRAG UNITED
The third youngest club – after Mumbai FC and Sporting Clube – came through the ranks of the IFA League in Kolkata before joining the elite. Backed by a computer company but beset by similar licensing problems as Air India.

The movers and shakers in INDIAN FOOTBALL

BHAICHUNG BHUTIA
National captain and possibly the player who has made the most impact on the sport, hence the first footballer to receive the award of *Padmashree*, which is given by the government to recognise outstanding contributions in various spheres, while still playing. Played for Bury in England and is president of the players' association, which he helped found in 2006.

VIJAY MALLYA
India's very own Richard Branson made an immediate impact on the game when he burst onto the scene in 1998. Wearing a shirt which showcased both liquor brands that he wanted to associate with the country's two biggest rivals, Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, he announced plans to bankroll both clubs, though he has cut back recently. He was rumoured to have backed an abortive bid to oust federation president Priyaranjan Das Munshi in 2000.



ALBERTO COLACO
General secretary of the All India Football Federation – and it is largely because of him that, despite stadium unavailability, international commitments and political strikes throwing domestic fixtures out of gear, 11 National League campaigns and the first I-League season have been completed.

SYED RAHIM
National coach in the glorious 1950s and 1960s, when India became a major footballing power in Asia. Known to be a stern taskmaster, the man from Hyderabad twice steered his charges to Asian Games gold medals.

K SANKAR
He was India's flag bearer – literally – at the World Cup. The Chennai-based assistant referee was part of the pool for the 2002 finals in Japan/South Korea and was on the line for the Mexico-Croatia group match.

SUBIMAL "CHUNI" GOSWAMI
His nickname literally means "a precious stone". Voted Asia's best striker in 1962, he led India in 1964, and the Bengal Ranji Trophy cricket team to two finals thereafter. Joined Mohun Bagan's junior team in 1946 and stayed with the club until retiring in 1968. Indian football's first pin-up boy, he was also the first director of the Tata Football Academy, the country's first football school, founded in 1987.

BOB HOUGHTON
English resident of Cape Town and the man credited with getting Indian players to take pride in the national shirt. Former coach of China and Uzbekistan, his tenure began in 2006 with a 3-0 home defeat by Saudi Arabia, followed by a 7-1 thrashing in the Gulf, but turned things round the following year. Reviving the Nehru Cup, which India won in 2007, was his idea. The AIFF extended his contract until the 2011 Asian Cup.

PK BANERJEE
Legendary former national team player and scorer of India's first goal against South Korea in the 1962 Olympic Final. Now the country's most successful club coach, his last international assignment came in 2006, when he was the technical director.

PRAFUL PATEL
The longest serving AIFF vice-president, India's aviation minister is now the acting AIFF president. In keeping with the traditional Indian politician's ability to wear many honorary hats, Patel also heads the Western India Football Association, which runs the sport in Maharashtra, and the state's Olympic body.

PRIYARANJAN DAS MUNSHI
Federation president since 1988, he has been critically ill following a heart attack in October. Even though on life-support, the federation still wants to continue with him officially at the helm. A member of prime minister Manmohan Singh's cabinet, his political connections have helped get funds but left him with little time for football.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Getting bigger...the I-League expands to 14 teams next year

- Two years old, the I-League is played on a home-and-away basis. It will be expanded to 14 teams next season and to 16 in 2010-11.
- The Federation Cup, the other competition organised by the federation, was altered this season with zonal qualifiers joining the 12 League teams. Sixteen teams were split into four groups with the winners making it to the semi-finals.
- From this season, the League champions will play in the Asian Champions League qualifiers, with the Federation Cup winners getting an AFC Cup berth.
- Apart from the World Cup, Olympic and Asian Cup qualifiers, the national team play in the Nehru Cup, a biennial tournament revived after 10 years in 2007. Victory in the AFC Challenge Cup has given the national side its passport to the 2011 Asian Cup finals in Doha.

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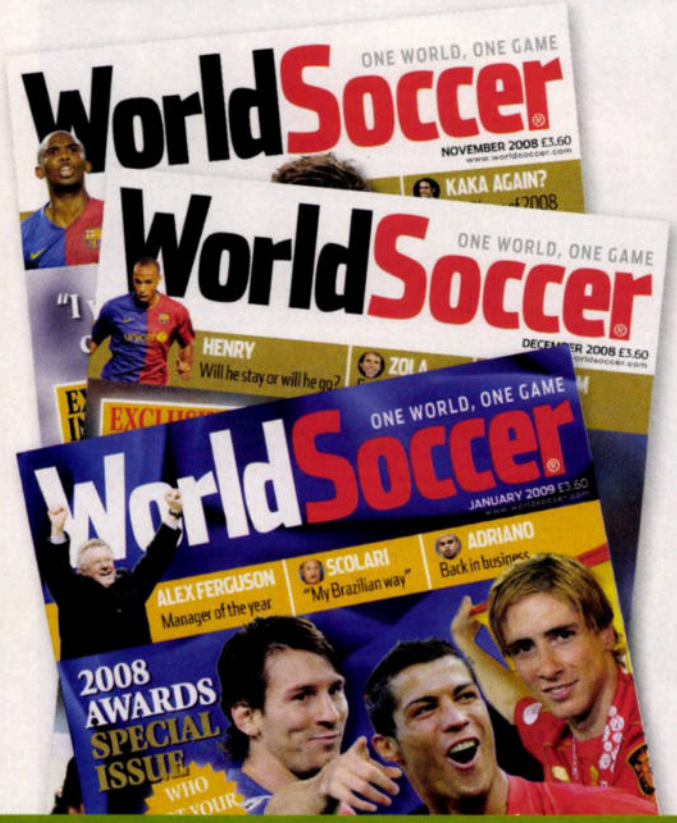

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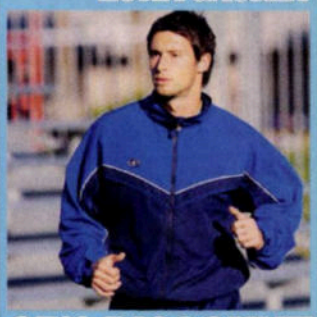

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WORLD SERVICE

THE ULTIMATE GLOBAL NEWS AND RESULTS DIGEST

Fight back...Luis Montes (on ground) scored Pachuca's first goal as they came from two down to beat Al Ahly 4-2 in the Club World Cup

Man United reign supreme in Japan

Sir Alex Ferguson's side add the Club World Cup to their trophy collection

THE CONCLUSIVE FACT was a simple one: a goal from Wayne Rooney crowned Manchester United the best club side in the world as the European champions, despite the expulsion of Nemanja Vidic, beat disappointing South American champions LDU Quito from Ecuador 1-0 in the FIFA Club World Cup Final at the Yokohama International Stadium.

Financially, there was not a lot in it, as United carried off the top prize of £3.45million, with LDU receiving £2.76m. But the money is less important than the lack of any evidence of a shift in the balance of power within the world club game.

Of course, since Europe represents about 90 per cent of the financial wealth of world football, that should not be a surprise. But when FIFA executive committee men from Asia and Africa were lobbying for a place at the top competitive table, their interests were clearly not leaning heavily towards sporting angles.

In all four competitions since the multi-club FIFA event replaced the old Europe v South America World Club Cup, the balance of power remains exactly the same. It is always Europe against South America in the Final, with the assorted Africans, Mexicans and Asians scrambling for the spare cash, all confident in the knowledge that none of them will finish in seventh and last spot as that is reserved for whichever hapless club comes out of New Zealand – in this year's case, Waitakere United.

FIFA officials may put a positive spin on the promotional value of the event beyond Europe and South America, not to mention the valuable intercontinental experience offered to the match officials. But is the certainty of annual defeat a promotional plus? Is repeated proof that the top club from Africa and/or Asia and/or Central and North America remains uncompetitive at the highest level really positive?

Al Ahly, for example, are the most popular club in Egypt and, for most of the present youthful century, have been the dominant club in African football. Yet they lost 4-2 in extra time in the quarter-finals to Pachuca, who are not exactly ranked among the traditional powers of Mexican football.

Similarly, Gamba Osaka may be a force in Japan but they were let off lightly in losing 5-3 to an under strength Manchester United in the semi-finals. That Gamba finished third was enjoyable for them but means nothing in terms of world club status.

Classy finish...Wayne Rooney scores the only goal of the Final

In the Final, United made harder work of beating LDU than needed. Truth to say, a clutch of South Americans clubs from Argentina and Brazil would have given manager Sir Alex Ferguson's men a tougher test both mentally and tactically, not to mention physically.

Indeed, it was mildly depressing to see LDU representing South America at all. The fact that they had won the Libertadores Cup from a modest base of both talent and finance underlined the enormity of the damage done to Argentinian and Brazilian club football by the voracious, lucrative appetite of European clubs for just about any and every South American teenager of talent.

It was surely significant that the annual poll run by *El Pais* of Montevideo to pick the South American Footballer of the Year came up with veterans in the top two places: Argentina's Juan Sebastian Veron (aged 33, of Estudiantes de La Plata) and Juan Roman Riquelme (aged 30, from Boca Juniors). Both have taken their talents to Europe and are now winding down as elder statesmen back where they began.

El Pais confines itself, intriguingly and laudably, to players contracted within South America. But the poll's message is that South America's finest are no longer to be found in South America – which is, simplistically maybe, why worthy but unworthy LDU found themselves failing to prevent United from landing the club crown for the second time in their history (following a victory in 1999 which pre-dated the current format).

Rooney said: "We're very proud of this because it was a tough game, especially after going down to 10 men. We defended well as a team and, for myself, to have scored

On top of the world...Skipper Rio Ferdinand lifts the Club World Cup

FIFA Club World Cup Japan

No danger...Gamba Osaka's Satoshi Yamaguchi clears his lines in the third-place play-off

the winning goal is a great feeling. We're amazed by the number of fans who travelled here to support us. We're the best team in the world and they're the best fans in the world."

Rooney won the man of the tournament prize, with Cristiano Ronaldo the runner-up and LDU's Damian Alejandro Manso voted third.

United dominated possession throughout the Final, even though LDU's outgoing coach, Edgardo Bauza, had promised that his own team were prepared to "play the game of their lives".

In fact, they sat back for all of the first half and could have been dead and buried by half-time. Only good fortune and the reflexes of veteran keeper Jose Cevallos kept them on terms. He made one particularly sharp save from a Carlos Tevez header, but was lucky when Rooney ran through the heart of the defence only to chip the ball not only over the keeper but over the bar as well.

United were reduced to 10 men three minutes into the second half when Serbia defender Vidic was sent off for sticking an elbow into the face of Claudio Bieler when the pair clashed after a tackle. LDU, thus encouraged, finally began to push forward and Edwin Van der Sar saved competently enough from Manso, Jairo Campos and Norberto Araujo.

Ronaldo, however, continued to tease LDU's defence with his skill and technique, and it was a superb lay-off from the Portugal winger which set up Rooney to thump home the winning goal.

United captain Rio Ferdinand said: "To be European champions was great but now we can say we're the best team in the world – and there aren't many players who get the opportunity to achieve that.

"We created a lot of chances and hopefully the fans were pleased with the way we played, especially in the first half. We knew LDU were a good team and would create problems. Manso was fantastic. But we kept them to long shots and, on another day, we would have scored three or four goals ourselves."

They would not have been flattered by such a margin which is not, really, what the club world needed to know.

Keir Radnedge

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

THE FINAL

YOKOHAMA, DECEMBER 21, 2008

MANCHESTER UNITED 1 (Rooney 72)
LDU 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 68,682. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Rafael (Neville 85), Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra - Ronaldo, Carrick, Anderson (Fletcher 88), Park - Tevez (Evans 60), Rooney. **Sent-off:** Vidic 48min.
Coach: Ferguson.
Unused subs: Kuszczak, Berbatov, Giggs, Nani, Scholes, Welbeck, O'Shea, Gibson, Amos.
LDU: Cevallos - W Araujo, Calle (Ambrosi 77), Campos, Calderon - Reasco (Larrea 83), Urrutia, N Araujo - Manso - Bolanos (Navia 88), Bieler.
Coach: Bauza.
Unused subs: Dominguez, Obregon, Delgado, E Vaca, D Vaca, Chango, Viteri.

• *For full competition results, see Results, starting page 101.*

FRANCE

Fernandez returns at the sharp end

LUIS FERNANDEZ is one of the best-known and most controversial figures in French football. His radio talk show, the perfectly named *Luis Attaque* (Luis Attacks), has been on air since 2003 and is one of the most talked-about and controversial shows in France. It's deliberately rowdy and great knockabout fun. Fernandez, 49, is highly opinionated and therefore highly listenable, never holding back when he gets the chance to have a dig at football folk he doesn't agree with or simply doesn't get on with.

Fernandez is so good behind the mike that it's easy to forget that his real trade is actually that of football coach – especially since the former Paris Saint-Germain boss hasn't had a job sitting on the bench in his home country for more than five years. But all that changed at the end of December when Fernandez, who won the 1984 European Championship as a player with France – signed an 18-month contract to take charge at Reims.

This isn't what you'd call returning through the front door. Reims are currently bottom of the French second division with 12 points from 18 games and many an eyebrow was raised when Fernandez – who won the European Cup-winners Cup, the French Cup and League Cup with PSG – signed on the dotted line with a club in such a lowly position.

After all, this is a manager who has a CV that's not to be sniffed at, having also done good work in Spain at the helm of Athletic Bilbao, Espanyol and Real Betis. But Fernandez's big mouth has upset some influential people over the years, and his singularly unapologetic character seems to be less and less appreciated in a world that lionises those who toe the party line and keep their heads below the parapet.

He has a reputation in France as an *emmerdeur*, a shit stirrer, but it's a reputation he denies, of course, claiming he simply likes imposing his ideas, which at the end of the day is what a manager is paid to do. But whether Fernandez is or isn't a pain in the backside, the fact that he's back is undeniably good for French football, which is far too often populated by bland and anodyne managers who put out bland and anodyne teams.

Fernandez will certainly shake things up, and if he can save Reims from a humiliating relegation this season it could well be the launch pad he needs to project himself back to the top of French football management. On behalf of all those who like to see "characters" in the game, here's hoping.

With the winter break restricting activity on the pitch, it was down to the French Cup to kick football back into life on the first weekend in January as the big boys entered the fray. The heroes of the round had to be Schirrhein, an amateur club seven leagues off the top flight, who dumped second division Clermont out of the tournament with a thrilling 4-2 home win.

Elsewhere, Saint-Etienne pulled off an impressive 1-0 win at high-flying Bordeaux, while second division Ajaccio went through after beating Ligue 1's Auxerre on penalties. Marseille, meanwhile, were given a real shock by lowly Besancon before scrambling through to the next round, also on penalties.

The return to league action sees Lyon kick off the second half of the campaign on top of the pile. No great surprises there, but with just a three-point advantage over Bordeaux, four on third-placed Rennes and five on fourth-placed PSG, Lyon have got plenty of work to do if they're to win an eighth straight title. Given the club's dominance of the domestic game, a more open championship can only be a good thing.

Howard Johnson

New show in town...Fernandez arrives to take training at Reims

Give us a break, ref...Benfica's frustrated players dispute a decision in their increasingly futile attempts to find a way past Nacional

PORTUGAL

Benfica lead the way

BENFICA led the league at the winter break for the first time in 15 years, but the achievement was tainted somewhat by a tame 0-0 home draw with Nacional in the final match.

The Eagles of Lisbon had a chance to soar four points ahead of Leixoes and Porto in the standings, but were unable to break down their opponents from Madeira even though they fielded three forwards – David Suazo, Oscar Cardozo and Nuno Gomes – for a large part of the second half.

Still, Benfica finished the first half of the season unbeaten, the only European side who could boast that invincible record, and could be on their way to a first league title since 2005.

A run of three matches without a win saw Leixoes lose top spot, but Jose Mota's side still managed to reach the end of the year on the same points as Porto and the seaside club still harbour hopes of qualifying for the UEFA Cup.

With Brazilian striker Wesley second in the goalscorers table, Leixoes had the league's third best attack and continued to prove through their final games of 2008 that they will be a tough nut to crack.

Sporting Lisbon went into the new year hoping for more consistency. There have been ups and downs both at home and in Europe, where the Lions were able to beat Shakhtar Donetsk and Basle away but still found themselves on the wrong end of a 5-2 thrashing by Barcelona at home. Despite that defeat they still managed to qualify for the knockout phase of the Champions League for the first time.

Sporting were joined by Porto as Portugal's representatives in the round of 16, while Sporting Braga were the only Liga Sagres side to survive the UEFA Cup group phase.

Pedro Pinto

AUSTRIA

Janko's goals boost Salzburg

The incredible scoring power of Marc Janko, who plundered 30 of his team's 57 goals, kept Red Bull Salzburg on top of the Bundesliga at the winter break.

Last year's runners-up were four points clear of defending champions Rapid Wien with a game in hand. However, Janko was being chased by a number of clubs, including Tottenham, Blackburn, Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Hertha Berlin, and his exit seemed only a matter of time.

Small-town club Altach, bottom of the league, are facing yet another hammer blow with the likely departure of Brazilian striker Ailton.

Harry Miltner

HOLLAND

Huntelaar off to Madrid

Klaas-Jan Huntelaar completed a £25million December move to Real Madrid after Ajax coach Marco Van Basten changed his mind over a player he had vowed would not be sold.

Van Basten had been anxious to avoid the fate of 2007, when Wesley Sneijder was a last-minute capture by Madrid. Ajax's inability to find a suitable replacement was a significant factor in their failure to win the title.

But things apparently changed. Last year national team striker Huntelaar scored 33 goals in 34 league matches, but this season did not start well as he was sidelined by ankle problems and then refused to extend or renew his contract past 2010.

"This is the best possible solution," Van Basten explained of the deal with Madrid. "After all, he hasn't been at his best and we have already signed his successor [Argentinian Dario Cvitanich]."

Ajax did persuade Daley Blind, son of technical director Danny Blind, to renew his contract until 2013. The 17-year-old defensive midfielder, who recently made his debut, is already on Arsenal's wanted list.

Meanwhile, Cvitanich hit a hat-trick in a 3-0 win over ADO Den Haag that took Ajax into the winter break trailing leaders AZ Alkmaar by three points.

Things are going from bad to worse for arch rivals Feyenoord, who dropped to 13th place after defeats by AZ and PSV. Technical director Peter Bosz bore the brunt of the fans' anger but the *Algemeen Dagblad* newspaper revealed a majority of the squad (14 to 4) had voted in a secret poll against keeping coach Gertjan Verbeek.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

All change for Rovers

Shamrock Rovers, arguably Ireland's best-known club, will end their nomadic existence in March when they move into a new stadium in Tallaght, south Dublin.

The Hoops have shared grounds with various other Dublin clubs since then owners, the Kilcoynes, sold their old home, Glenmalure Park, in 1987.

Rovers will also begin the new season with a new manager – former Northern Ireland international Michael O'Neill, who was boss at Brechin City.

Sean Connor has replaced John Gill at promoted Dundalk, while Cork City have parted company with Alan Mathews after just one season in charge.

St Patrick's Athletic will revert to part-time football next season. Other clubs seem certain to follow since attendances are poor and they can no longer afford to pay exorbitant wages.

Sean Creedon

High steppers...Lucerne (blue) take on Basle

SWITZERLAND

Rolf pysches out Basle

A SHREWD piece of psychology by coach Rolf Fringer enabled bottom of the table Lucerne to pull off the shock of the season to date, thrashing champions Basle 5-1 in the last game before the winter break.

Fringer told his team to play on their opponents' fragility following their Champions League group-stage exit [they finished with just one point and endured five-goal trouncings by Barcelona and Shakhtar Donetsk].

"I knew Basle were on a mental low so I told my players to go all out for early goals and it worked a treat," said former national team boss Fringer. Lucerne were 2-0 up inside 35 minutes and cashed in as Basle's defence fell apart.

Basle coach Christian Gross, harried by calls from fans and media for his head, admitted: "We have still not digested our lamentable performances in the Champions League. But I assure you we will get back to winning ways."

A news conference called at short notice by president Gisela "Gigi" Oeri, heightened speculation that a change was imminent. Instead she announced they had extended Gross' contract to 2011 with an option for a further year.

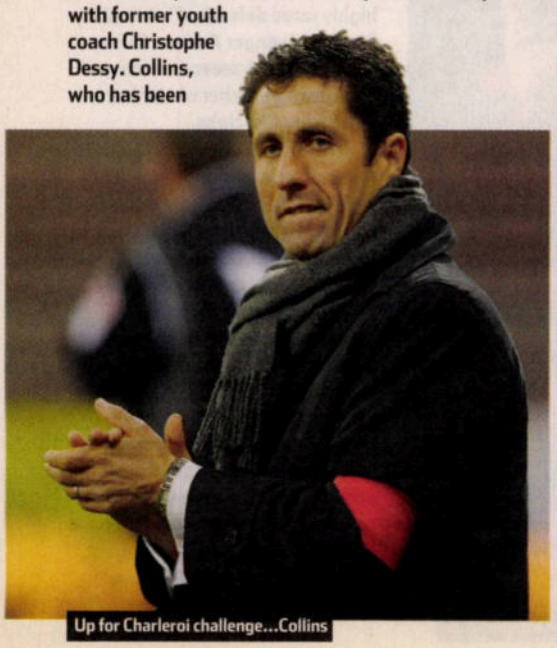
Oeri said they had taken into account his achievements – four championships, four Cup wins and two Champions League appearances – in his 10 years with the club. She declined to discuss the latest Champions League debacle, adding: " I am more upset that FC Zurich have a four-point lead."

Ivar von Rulach

BELGIUM

Charleroi turn to Collins

THE FEAR of relegation has persuaded two more clubs to change coaches in mid-term. Charleroi have appointed former Scotland midfielder John Collins as successor to Thierry Siquet, who was dismissed after a 1-0 defeat by Genk, while Mons replaced Thierry Pister with former youth coach Christophe Dessy. Collins, who has been given a contract until the end of the season, had been out of work since leaving Hibernian 14 months ago.



Up for Charleroi challenge...Collins

Charleroi went into the winter break placed 12th, two positions and six points better off than Mons, who parted company with Pister after he had appeared to have "lost" the dressing room, falling out with such senior players as Mohamed Dahmane, Frederic Herpoel and Mounir Diane.

Standard Liege are Belgium's last survivors in the UEFA Cup, securing their place in the last 32 before losing their final group game 3-0 to Stuttgart.

Not so fortunate were Club Brugge, who were eliminated following a 2-1 home defeat by Copenhagen which came in the middle of a disastrous four-match losing sequence that also cost them the domestic leadership. Their 4-1 home defeat by Standard – during which goalkeeper Sijn Stijnen was sent off – was bad enough, but then came an astonishing 5-1 reverse at Mouscron which left them trailing leaders Anderlecht by seven points.

Anderlecht went into the break four points clear of second-placed Standard despite losing Czech goalkeeper Daniel Zitke to an ankle injury.

The league leaders spent the break involved in some furious transfer activity, the most surprising of which saw Bart Goor set to join Germinal Beerschot.

Nicholas Harling

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SCOTLAND

McGeady row sours Celtic

Heading for trouble...Celtic's McGeady tussles with Robbie Neilson of Hearts in the game that led to his confrontation with Strachan

CELTIC ended the year on top of the SPL, seven points clear of rivals Rangers. However, harmony at Parkhead was disrupted by the conduct of Republic of Ireland winger Aiden McGeady, who was embroiled in a dressing-room row with manager Gordon Strachan after a 1-1 home draw with Hearts.

The dispute cost McGeady a ban and fine of two weeks wages – and his future was further placed in doubt after Celtic confirmed the capture of Derry City's Northern Ireland winger Niall McGinn.

Faced with recurring concerns over the reliability of their talented but erratic Polish goalkeeper, Artur Boruc, Celtic have signed a pre-contract agreement with another Pole, Lukasz Zaluska of Dundee United, who will move to Glasgow in the summer.

As the title battle turns into to the familiar two-horse race, Hearts majority shareholder Vladimir Romanov, who once vowed to end Old Firm dominance, appears to have scaled down his ambitions. "We aim at making our players grow in class so we can sell them later. Every footballer should improve and move to a better level. We shouldn't prevent them from doing it," said the Lithuanian.

That could mean an exit for highly rated defender Christophe Berra and winger Andrew Driver during the mid-season window. Both have a number of admirers among English clubs.

The SPL is considering plans to reintroduce a winter break – last used in 2002-03 – after the 2010 World Cup, which requires an early finish to the 2009-10 season.

SFA chief executive Gordon Smith has widened the debate, calling for Scotland to look at summer football. "I'm in favour of a winter shutdown," Smith said. "We had a month before, but I think it should be two months. We should look at playing in the best possible weather because it suits players and improves the game. I'd be in favour of starting in August, finishing in June and having a break in January and February."

Dan Brennan

ICELAND

Gudmundsson crunch

As the credit crunch bites deeper, Reykjavik District Court has granted a three-month extension on suspension of payments to Hansa Holdings, owner of English Premier League club West Ham. This gives the company and its owner, West Ham chairman Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson, until the end of March to find a purchaser for the club.

Despite profound financial problems arising from the collapse of Landsbanki, the bank which he owned and formed the cornerstone of many business interests, Gudmundsson has publicly denied being under pressure to sell. Despite this, he is reportedly in negotiation with a number of interested potential buyers.

Kristinn Jakobsson became the first Icelandic referee to take charge of a Champions League tie when he refereed December's group match between Shakhtar Donetsk and Basle.

Rab Christie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Walker boosts Ballymena

After a dismal start to the season when they won only one of their first 16 league games – albeit at home to champions Linfield – Ballymena United manager Roy Walker's frustration was evident as he announced he would be transfer-listing seven players in January.

However, that seems to have worked a miraculous recovery for the Light Blues, who had been looking cast-iron favourites for relegation until they won four games on the trot – including a defeat of leaders Glentoran – to lift themselves off the bottom.

Roy Kitson

WALES

Big three shocked

Just as they were beginning to break away, top three Llanelli, Rhyl and The New Saints were brought back to earth over one weekend.

Rhyl went down 4-3 at home to NEWI Cefn Druids, Llanelli 3-1 at Gap Connah's Quay and Saints 1-0 at Airbus UK. It gave hope to Carmarthen Town, lying fourth on a five-match winning streak, and Aberystwyth Town, with five wins in the last six.

Technogroup Welshpool appointed Huw Griffiths, previously assistant at Chester City, as manager and Mark Jones returned as boss of Port Talbot.

Mel Thomas

ESTONIA

All over for Reim

Former national team midfielder Martin Reim has decided to retire. Reim, 37, who made his international debut 16 years ago, was Europe's most-capped player with 156 appearances.

National coach Tarmo Ruutli has also been named boss of record champions Flora Tallinn. The situation isn't unique for Ruutli – he was in charge of both national team and Flora between 1999 and 2000.

Andres Must

LATVIA

Goodbye, FK Riga

The financial crisis has claimed its first victim in Latvian football. FK Riga, sixth in the league and struggling with financial problems all last year, finally declared bankruptcy a few weeks after the end of the championship.

"This is a very painful situation," said Janis Mezeckis, the FA general secretary. "We did all we could but will work on a mechanism to help prevent this kind of thing in the future."

Andres Must

Copenhagen hero...Cesar Santin

NORWAY

Weary Hareide calls it quits

A DISILLUSIONED AAGE HAREIDE quit as national coach, saying he no longer felt capable of lifting the team out of their current rut.

The dismal performance in the 1-0 friendly defeat by Ukraine in mid-November, meaning Norway did not achieve a single win in 2008, only increased the pressure on Hareide. He announced his resignation a few weeks later, saying: "I no longer have the motivation that enables me to make the national team perform as well as I would have liked to.

Feeling the strain...Hareide announces his resignation

"The national team needs a coach who can give maximum effort in 2009 and I believe someone other than me can take us to the World Cup in South Africa."

Hareide, 55, who played for Manchester City and Norwich and won 50 caps for Norway, took over the national team reins from Nils Johan Semb in 2004 but did not succeed – as did his predecessors Egil Olsen (twice) and Semb (once) – in taking them to the finals of tournaments. Under Hareide, Norway won 24 of their 58 matches.

Champions Stabaek will start the 2009 season with their potent strike partnership of Daniel Nannskog and Icelander Pall Gunnarsson broken up as the latter has signed for French club Nancy. Lyn's Espen Hoff is his replacement, while the Oslo club have also lost midfielder Thomasz Sokolowski to Viking.

Start, back in the top division next season, have signed veteran midfielder Erik Mykland on a one-year contract and will also have a new coach, Knut Torum succeeding Arne Sandst.

Tromso lost coach Steinar Nilsen, who took over from Mons Ivar Mjelde at Brann, but acted swiftly to bring back former coach Per Mathias Hogmo for his second spell in charge.

Sigurd Odegaard

DENMARK

Copenhagen on course

FC COPENHAGEN produced a shock 1-0 victory over Club Brugge in Belgium to give Denmark two clubs in the last 32 of the UEFA Cup. A goal from Brazilian striker Cesar Santin, his ninth of the season, put Copenhagen through to join AaB Aalborg and delight manager Stale Sobakken.

The club immediately vowed that 24-year-old Santin would not be sold in the January transfer window, despite reports linking him with moves to the Bundesliga.

It capped a fine spell for Copenhagen, who finished the winter season of the Danish Superliga in second place, just two points behind capital city rivals Brondby, who claimed top spot with a 1-0 triumph away to OB Odense, thanks to a goal from Ousman Jallow. OB are in third place, four points adrift of the leaders.

Kent Nielsen, manager of bottom of the table AC Horsens, will join Brondby during the winter break, the move having been agreed last summer. The timing is ironic, but Nielsen, the former Aston Villa defender and Euro 1992 winner, is widely regarded as one of Denmark's best young coaches.

Jim Holden

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Frustration...Blazevic is fed up with the federation's internal wrangling

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Blazevic threatens to walk away

NATIONAL COACH Miroslav Blazevic has threatened to quit over divisions within the federation, where secretary Munib Usanovic has stepped down but the different nationalities cannot agree over his successor.

Blazevic, who has called for Usanovic to be re-appointed, said: "I know they are disunited but do they think they can support my team that way?"

The debt-laden federation's main problem is that Usanovic doesn't speak any foreign languages, and last year it spent £93,000 on translators for him.

The federation is also facing a problem over TV rights. Usanovic and recent president Iljo Dominkovic signed a deal for the World Cup qualifiers that they claimed was worth £3.7million. But other countries ranked at a similar level to Bosnia-Herzegovina have reported receiving nearer £7.4m.

Better news are the encouraging noises being received from Ermin Bicakic, the young Stuttgart defender whom the federation would like to throw in his lot with the national team. Bicakic, born in Bosnia but who has already played for Germany's Under-17 and Under-19 teams, has said he would prefer to play for the country of his birth.

Zdravko Reic

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SLOVENIA

Zahovic backs down

Federation president Rudi Zavrl has headed off a challenge from Zlatko Zahovic, the country's leading football personality.

Zahovic, 37, the former national team star midfielder who is now manager of Maribor, had backed an attempt to remove Zavrl, then changed his mind and insisted that Zavrl, who has been president for 20 years, was still the best man for the job.

Cynics suggested his change of heart may have had something to do with the decision to switch national team home games to Maribor, where the local club, under Zahovic, led the table at the winter break.

Zdravko Reic

CROATIA

Kwedi "fix" claim backlash

Sibenik player Patrice Kwedi provoked a storm of controversy when he claimed, in a private conversation, that a match between his club and Zadar was fixed.

The 25-year-old Cameroonian was reported to have said Sibenik "gave points to them last year", prompting USKOK, Croatia's anti-corruption agency, to investigate.

Kwedi and other Sibenik players tried to explain that the conversation was a joke that had backfired, but Zadar and Sibenik now face being fined and having points deducted.

Ironically, Sibenik are the talk of this season's championship, having unexpectedly climbed to third, behind Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split.

Both leading clubs have changed coaches – Hajduk brought in Ante Mise to replace Goran Vucevic, while Dinamo recently removed Branko Ivankovic and installed his assistant Marijan Vlak.

Arsenal striker Eduardo da Silva's return to action after a long spell out injured has prompted national coach Slaven Bilic to hope he can be called up for February's friendly against Romania.

Bilic also confirmed that he will quit at the end of the 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign.

Zdravko Reic

TURKEY

Sivasspor on top again

Sivasspor, the unsung club from Anatolia, finished the first half of the season top of the league for the second year running but under pressure to keep their best players.

Last year, the red and whites eventually finished fourth but this time not only have the big clubs been

breathing down their necks but need to fend off swoops from the likes of Galatasaray, who covet striker Mehmet Yildiz. Gala, though, have not been short of goals with Milan Baros and Lincoln in superb form with 14 and seven goals respectively.

Fenerbahce made the first new year signing by netting Gokhan Emreciksin from Ankaragucu for £1.8million.

Angry Besiktas coach Mustafa Denizli vowed to sign new blood after losing the Istanbul derby 4-2 to Galatasaray. He said: "Some of my players do not believe they can win this league. Those who think that are going to leave the club in January."

Mehmet Demircan

MONTENEGRO

Mogren muddle through

Mogren kept their heads when their rivals were losing theirs – or rather, their feet – to lead the league at the winter break.

Most games in late autumn were played on terrible pitches with many resembling mud baths. Mogren, despite losing 1-0 at home to Sutjeska in the final round, still went into the break with a four-point advantage over champions Buducnost, while Grbalj, the surprise packets this season, were third.

Vladimir Novak

MACEDONIA

Kostovski quits

Trifun Kostovski, the president and main sponsor of Vardar, has left the club after only six months.

Kostovski walked away after a series of defeats culminated in supporters attacking the team bus on the way home from a game against Napredok.

Makedonija, inspired by Brazilians Cezar De Brito and Washington Da Silva, led the table by seven points from Milano at the break.

National coach Srecko Katanec has said he will stand down at the end of the World Cup 2010 qualifiers.

Michel Stojmanovski

MALTA

Tip-top Hibernians

Hibernians confirmed their fine form in the Premier League with four consecutive wins, in which they scored 13 goals and kept a clean sheet, including a 6-0 thrashing of closest challengers Birkirkara.

The Paolites were top with 25 points from 11 matches and Birkirkara a point adrift.

Msida St Joseph coach Patrick Curmi has switched to Marsaxlokk as a replacement for former Arsenal and England midfielder Brian Talbot, who has become technical director.

Domenico Aquilina

ALBANIA

Siskovic shocks Tirana

Coach Blaze Sliskovic quit FK Tirana with a parting shot at his players in the wake of a 2-2 draw with traditional rivals Partizani.

Sliskovic said: "My players are more interested in appearing on TV shows or in the tabloids than performances on the field."

Tirana fans backed the Croatian and blamed players, such as captain Devis Muka, for a series of poor results which allowed Vllaznia to claim top spot.

Former national team striker Augustin Kola, a Tirana hero in the 1980s, was named as Sliskovic's replacement, although he has no first-team coaching experience.

Gezim Nushi

Struggle...Partizan (stripes) take on Rad

GREECE

Nikopolidis contemplates gardening leave

Green fingers?...keeper Nikopolidis has outside interests

FORMER national team goalkeeper Antonis Nikopolidis has yet to decide whether to accept an offer to become a gardener for the northern Athens suburb of Kifissia.

Nikopolidis, a hero of Greece's surprising Euro 2004 win, has been offered the job but it has brought ridicule from the domestic media.

Nikopolidis, 38, who plays for Greek champions Olympiakos and is one of the highest-paid domestic stars, applied for the post using legislation that honours "outstanding athletes" by offering them jobs in the public sector.

Nikopolidis was voted best goalkeeper of 2008 by his fellow professionals, who named Panathinaikos striker Dimitris Salpingidis player of the year, and AEK Athens coach Dusan Bajevic best manager for his previous work at Aris Salonica. Darko Kovacevic of Olympiakos and AEK's Argentinian forward Ismael Blanco shared best foreign player award.

Only 8,000 turned out for the friendly between Greece and Italy in Piraeus, which ended 1-1. The players and coach Otto Rehhagel believe it is time to move the national team's matches outside Athens – and February's friendly against Denmark will be played in the northern city of Volos.

Lou Economopoulos

SERBIA

Ups and downs for Jokanovic

PARTIZAN BELGRADE finished bottom of their UEFA Cup group with zero points and were also struggling in the league, taking two points from the last three games. But it was still enough to claim the "autumn title", three points ahead of Vojvodina.

The position of coach Slavisa Jokanovic was under threat, especially after the 1-1 draw with Rad, when a group of unhappy Partizan ultras boarded the team bus and confronted the players.

The FA named Nemanja Vidic player of the year, but Jokanovic, voted coach of the year, refused his award, describing it as ridiculous and absurd.

Dragoslav Stepanovic, coach of Cukaricki, resigned after his team lost seven games in a row and dropped to the bottom of the table.

The national team were beaten 1-0 by Poland in a friendly in Belek, Turkey. Both sides fielded virtual B teams, Serbia's starting line-up containing only two players – Ivan Obradovic and Nenad Milijas – who played in the last World Cup qualifiers.

Vladimir Novak

RUSSIA

Zhirkov is Player of the Year ahead of Arshavin

Mr Versatile...Zhirkov's all-round ability helped him scoop the end-of-season award

YURI ZHIRKOV was voted Russia's Player of the Year for 2008. The 25-year-old CSKA Moscow player topped the poll held by the Russian Football Union and finished ahead of several fellow Euro 2008 semi-finalists, including Andrei Arshavin.

Deployed as a left-back at Euro 2008 in a surprise decision by Russia coach Guus Hiddink, Zhirkov's biggest strength is his versatility and CSKA have since used him mostly in attack.

In addition to helping Russia reach the Euro semi-finals, Zhirkov also played an important role in CSKA winning the Russian Cup and finishing second in the Premier Liga, and helped the club advance to the knockout stage of the UEFA Cup where they were drawn to play Aston Villa.

Two other CSKA players were honoured at the post-season awards gala – Igor Akinfeev, 22, was voted the best goalkeeper for the second year in a row, while 18-year-old Alan Dzagoev earned the title of best newcomer. Rubin Kazan's Kurban Berdyev shared the prize for the best manager with two Dutchmen, Hiddink and Zenit coach Dick Advocaat.

Last season's League champions Rubin Kazan will play the Cup winners, CSKA, in the Super Cup on March 7 in advance of the opening of the new League campaign a week later.

Victor Gusev

HUNGARY

New stadiums lift gloom

Despite the country's deep financial crisis, the talk in Budapest is all of new stadiums. Ferencvaros' British owner Kevin McCabe held an end-of-year presentation at Buda Castle during which he revealed his plans for the reconfiguration of the club's Ulloi Ut stadium. The new Albert Arena will be part of a £50million complex that includes a hotel, shops and offices.

The ground itself would have to be rotated 90 degrees to suit UEFA's recently established regulation that all new stadiums must be aligned north-south as the afternoon sun may bother goalkeepers at those set up east-west. Work is scheduled to start in 2010 and is expected to last three years.

During that time Fradi will play home games at the national Ferenc Puskas stadium – an arena that has been the subject of much debate, most of it centring on the city's bid to host the Olympic Games in 2020.

If parliament gives the go-ahead, this post-war relic will be completely overhauled to host at least five sports. A new venue will also be constructed from scratch on the northern tip of Csepel Island, south of the city centre. The Olympic football tournament would take place at both sites.

Peterjon Cresswell

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CZECH REPUBLIC

Sochaux sign Sverkos

Czech international striker Vaclav Sverkos has joined French side Sochaux from Banik Ostrava for a transfer fee of around £1.82million.

The 25-year-old previously had spells with Borussia Monchengladbach, Hertha Berlin and Austria Wien before returning home in 2007, when a prolific goalscoring record last season earned him a place in the national team's Euro 2008 squad.

Slavia Prague, the last Czech team in European competition, failed to progress beyond the UEFA Cup's group phase. The Czech champions lost 2-0 at home to Hamburg and the club were later fined £13,600 by UEFA after spectators threw plastic glasses, cigarette lighters and other objects onto the pitch at the end of the game.

Poor performances in Europe this season look set to cost Czech clubs a Champions League place. A reduced UEFA coefficient is expected to mean only the League winners will qualify for the Champions League in 2010.

Brno have appointed Miroslav Beranek as a permanent replacement for coach Petr Ulicny, who was sacked in October. After just five League games in charge, coach Stanislav Levy has left bottom club Tescoma Zlin.

Sam Beckwith

POLAND

Lech in last 32

After drawing home games with Nancy and Deportivo La Coruna, and losing away to CSKA Moscow, Lech Poznan beat Feyenoord 1-0 in Rotterdam to secure third place in their group and become the first Polish club to get through the group stages of UEFA Cup.

Lech, who have ambitions to play in the Champions League next season, immediately declared that no players would leave the club during the winter break, despite rumours that Bosnia midfielder Semir Stilic could join Celtic and Poland international striker Robert Lewandowski could move to Napoli or Fiorentina in Italy.

They also reinforced their squad by signing Croatian midfielder Gordan Golik from Varteks Varazdin and two Bosnians – goalkeeper Jasmin Buric from Celik Zenica and striker Haris Handzic from Sarajevo.

With Lech also "winter kings" of the Polish league, ahead of second-place Legia Warsaw on goal difference, it was no surprise that they were voted team of the year by *Pilka Nozna* magazine. Lewandowski was named discovery of the year, Stilic was best foreigner and Franciszek Smuda won the coach of the year award.

Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski was voted player of the year.

Dariusz Kurowski

UKRAINE

Credit crunch bites deep

THE GLOBAL economic crisis is having a big impact on Ukraine's leading clubs with many announcing considerable budget cuts during the winter break.

Reigning champions Shakhtar Donetsk have told supporters that the club will no longer pay travel and accommodation expenses for European matches and Chornomorets Odessa president Leonid Klimov has cut his players' wages by 50 per cent.

Dynamo Kyiv coach Yuriy Semin was furious at the cancellation of the annual First Channel Cup in Israel after the organisers failed to provide free training camps and prize money as in previous years.

"This will have a very negative effect for our preparations for the play-off matches in the UEFA Cup. I'm very confused," said Semin.

Other clubs have opted to cut their squads. Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk parted company with nine players, while Karpaty Lviv terminated five contracts and Zorya Luhansk sacked four. In the most serious situation, Arsenal Kyiv and Illichivets Mariupol face possible bankruptcy and the complete disbanding of their squads.

In contrast, one of the country's biggest industrial oligarchs, Metalist president Olexander Yaroslavsky, has been inspired by his club's surprise wins over Galatasaray, Olympiakos and Benfica in the UEFA Cup group stage and vowed to dig deep to attract big names during the winter break.

He remained true to his word and the Steelers have already signed talented Dynamo Kyiv midfielder Denis Oliynyk – who spent the first half of the current season on loan at Arsenal Kyiv – and recruited experienced Andriy Berezovchuk, who used to play for city rivals FC Kharkiv.

Former Dynamo Kyiv goalkeeper Sviatoslav Syrota has been elected as the new president of Ukraine Professional League.

Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk midfielder Maksym Pashayev died after losing control of his car on an icy road between Kyiv and his native city of Kremenchuk. Pashayev played for his country at youth and Under-21 levels.

Oleg Zadernovsky

Happier times...Shakhtar fans enjoy Champions League football earlier this season

Sacked...Markov

BULGARIA

Markov pays for Serbia defeat

PLAMEN MARKOV was sacked by the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU) as national coach two weeks after the 6-1 loss to Serbia in Belgrade.

Although the defeat was Markov's first in his second spell in charge of the national team – following three draws from the first three World Cup qualifiers – all 13 members of the BFU executive committee decided to relieve him of his international obligations. During his first spell in charge, Markov had led his country to Euro 2004 in Portugal, but he was sacked after the finals.

A working party comprised of former players Borislav Mihaylov (the current BFU president), Yordan Lechkov, Nasko Sirakov and Emil Kostadinov will select the new coach, whose identity will be announced on January 30 at the BFU congress.

After leading the League for most of the first half of the season, CSKA conceded top spot to Levski, who went into the winter break with a one-point advantage. The gamble of bringing striker Georgi Ivanov back for a fourth spell at the club paid off for Levski as the 32-year-old scored six goals in the final few rounds before the break.

Former referees' chief Borislav Alexandrov and former BFU executive member Ivan Lekov have been charged as part of the ongoing match-fixing scandal. Aexandrov was accused of "exerting pressure and abuse with power" by fixing seven league matches. Lekov was accused of "financial abuses and fraud" by receiving bribes.

CSKA Sofia president Alexander Tomov faces up to 30 years in prison if found guilty of misappropriating funds from his steel company Kremikovtsi.

Rumen Paytashev

Title winner...Cristante pulls off the vital penalty save from Cruz Azul's Vela that clinched the opening championship for Toluca

MEXICO

Toluca owe it to Cristante

HERNAN CRISTANTE was the hero as Toluca won the Opening championship, beating Cruz Azul on penalties in the two-legged Final.

The 39-year-old goalkeeper, who at one stage of the competition went a Mexican record of 772 minutes (more than eight full games) without conceding a goal, saved Alejandro Vela's sudden-death penalty in the final as Toluca won the shootout 7-6, after a 2-2 aggregate draw.

Argentina-born Cristante has now won five Mexican titles since joining Toluca in 1998.

Toluca, who have won nine Mexican championships, including six since 1998, appeared to be hot favourites after winning 2-0 away in the first leg thanks to early goals from Paraguay defender Paulo da Silva and Sergio Ponce.

But Cruz Azul, also beaten by Santos Laguna in the previous championship's Final, won the second leg by the same score at the Nemesio Diaz. Vela opened the scoring after half-time and Julio Cesar Dominguez headed the second before Cristante pulled off his crucial stop in the shootout.

Toluca coach Jose Manuel de la Torre claimed the second title of his career, the first having come with Guadalajara in 2006 when they beat Toluca in the Final. Other key players were Da Silva and Brazil-born Mexico midfielder Antonio "Sinha" Naelson.

Toluca finished second in their qualifying group before sweeping past San Luis (Tecos UAG) in the quarter-finals and defending champions Santos Laguna in the semis.

As usual, the team which had the best record in the qualifying stage (when the 18 teams play each other once but are split into three groups), failed to win the title. San Luis' impressive total of 29 points counted for nothing as they lost to Santos Laguna in the quarter-finals.

Brian Homewood

CHILE

Palestino denied

Palestino, a small club representing Chile's 300,000-strong Palestinian community and featuring a couple of Palestine internationals, were denied the third title in their history when they lost to Colo Colo in the closing championship Final.

Luis Musrri's team topped Group Three in the qualifying stage and then overcame O'Higgins and Rangers in the knockout phase before coming unstuck against Colo Colo.

Palestino forced a 1-1 draw at home in the first leg despite playing for nearly the entire second half with nine men after goalkeeper Felipe Nunez and captain Roberto Bishara, one of their Palestine players, were sent off. But a late goal from Francisco Ibanez wiped out Argentinian striker Lucas Barrios' first-half penalty.

The teams were level 1-1 at half-time in the return after Barrios – the tournament's top scorer with 18 goals – again put Colo Colo ahead, only for Luis Pavez to level. But second-half goals from Daud Gazale and Rodrigo Millar ended Palestino's hopes.

It was Colo Colo's fifth title out of six in three years. They won both opening and closing tournaments in 2006 and 2007, and their run was only interrupted when they lost to Everton in the Final of this year's opening tournament.

Universidad de Chile and Universidad Catolica both replaced their coaches after falling at the quarter-final stage. Former Paraguay coach Sergio Markarian took over from Arturo Salah at the former and the outspoken Marco

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Antonio Figueroa, who led Cobreloa to the semi-finals where they lost to Colo Colo on away goals, took over from Mario Lepe at the latter.

Brian Homewood

COLOMBIA

America equal record

America won the closing championship, beating Independiente Medellin 4-1 on aggregate in the Final, to equal Millonarios' record of 13 national titles.

The Red Devils won 1-0 away in the first leg and 3-1 in the return to make up for the disappointment of losing to Boyaca Chico in the opening championship Final earlier in the year.

Deportivo Pereira, with Rene Higuita making yet another comeback at the age of 42, reached the last eight but lost their first semi-final group match 3-0 to America after a typical blunder from the "Scorpion" man.

Higuita raced from goal to try to stop an America attack in the opposition's half but missed the ball completely, and was stranded as America went through to score their third.

Deportivo Cali striker Freddy Montero finished the tournament's top scorer with 16 goals.

Brian Homewood

VENEZUELA

Italia win 18-team "failure"

Deportivo Italia won the first stage of the 2008-09 championship amid signs that the 18-team format is doomed to failure. Venezuela previously had only 10 teams in the first division but this was increased to make use of the impressive infrastructure built for the 2007 Copa America.

Guaros de Lara and Portuguesa were among the teams to feel the pinch and Portuguesa were beaten 9-2 by Deportivo Tachira after being forced to field a youth team because of a pay dispute with the professionals.

Brian Homewood

PERU

San Martin retain title

Deportivo San Martin won the 2008 championship to claim their second successive title.

They wrapped up the championship's second stage with three matches to spare and won the title automatically because first stage winners Universitario lost the right to play in the Final because they failed to finish in the top seven in the second stage.

Curiously, San Martin's last game was against Jose Galvez, who were in seventh place at the time and three points ahead of Universitario. This meant that Universitario's only hope of reaching the Final was a San Martin victory, combined with a couple of other favourable results. In the event, San Martin drew 2-2 and Universitario also drew.

Brian Homewood

URUGUAY

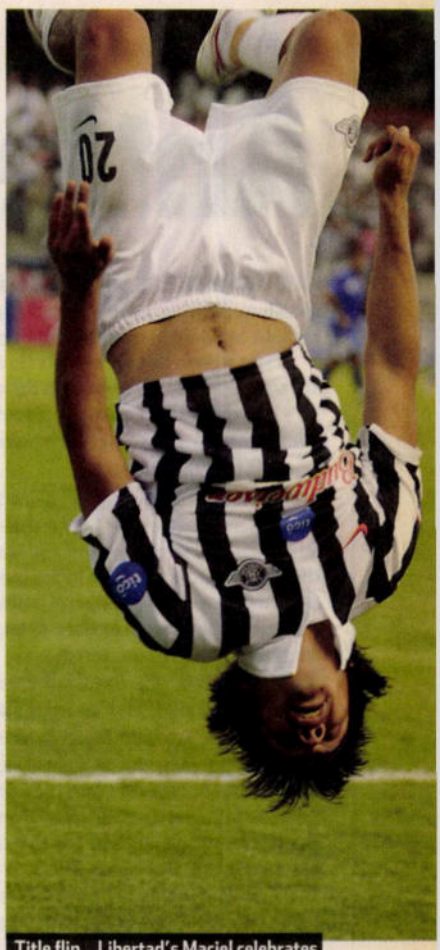
Security fears add to delays

The championship was suspended for a second time because of security worries, this time on the eve of the final round of matches in the tournament's first stage.

Nacional and Danubio were level on 29 points at the time with Racing Club and Defensor Sporting two points behind.

The sticking point was the arrangements for the Danubio-Penarol game at the Jardines del Hipodromo ground, where a riot a month earlier had promoted the first suspension lasting two weeks. Danubio said they had made the necessary arrangements but the police were not satisfied.

Brian Homewood



Title flip...Libertad's Maciel celebrates

ECUADOR

Unlikely lads win it for Deportivo

DEPORTIVO QUITO won the 2008 championship to claim their first title in 40 years with a team boasting several players in the twilight of their careers.

Quito, coached by Carlos Sevilla, included Colombia's 1998 World Cup striker Leider Preciado, plus Ecuador's 2002 World Cup goalkeeper Geovanny Ibarra and midfielder Edwin Tenorio.

It was an unlikely outfit from the start, as a number of directors questioned Sevilla's appointment, and Preciado and fellow striker Martin Mandra nearly came to blows during a game against Barcelona.

Things also turned sour after the title as Sevilla walked out in a row over bonuses and was replaced by Argentinian Ruben Omar Romano.

Deportivo Quito won the tournament's first stage and finished second in their group in the second stage. They carried three bonus points into the six-team final stage, where they took four points off Barcelona, won both derbies against South American champions LDU and clinched the title with a game to spare by beating Macara 2-1.

Barcelona began the final stage well but faded and eventually finished fifth, even missing out on the Libertadores Cup. Angry fans tried to break into the dressing room after they were held 1-1 by El Nacional in their last game. Coach Reinaldo Merlo resigned and accused directors of inciting the trouble. Former Real Madrid coach Benito Floro was named as his successor.

Brian Homewood

Champion feeling...Deportivo Quito skipper Luis Saritama hoists the trophy

PARAGUAY

Four in a row for Libertad

LIBERTAD continued their recent dominance of Paraguayan football when they won the 2008 closing championship to claim their fourth title in a row. They beat Sol de America 4-1 to finish one point ahead of Guarani, who had pushed them all the way.

It was a fitting farewell for Libertad's Uruguayan coach Ruben Israel, the architect of their last three titles, who stepped down immediately after the latest triumph.

Libertad previously won the 2006 and 2007 championships when only one tournament was held per season. This year, Paraguay switched to the two championships -per-season format used in most Latin American countries and Libertad won them both.

Cerro Porteno and Olimpia, traditionally the country's strongest clubs, again finished well off the pace, in third and seventh places respectively.

Brian Homewood

JAPAN

Antlers claim top prize

KASHIMA ANTLERS proved last season's smash-and-grab triumph in the J.League was no fluke by winning their second title in a row.

It was a close title race – only three points separated the top six clubs with three games to go – but Antlers held on to top place for the final two months to claim a sixth championship in the league's 16-year history.

That's not to say it was all plane sailing for the holders, however, as they endured a seven-game win-less streak in April and May, and then had a second stumble in September when Mitsuo Ogasawara was injured and sidelined for the rest of the season. Antlers, though, had the consistency when it mattered.

Marquinhos, who was the league's top scorer with 21 goals and landed the player of the year award, was a huge factor in his second season at the club, having arrived via Tokyo Verdy, Yokohama F-Marinos, JEF Chiba and Shimizu S-Pulse. It was the Brazilian's third championship, having won the title last year and previously with Marinos in 2003.

"Everyone wants to be top scorer and it has taken me eight years to get here," he said. "Now, I want to do it again."

Marquinhos was already a fine dribbler with exquisite technique, but he has grown under Antlers coach Oswaldo Oliveira to become a complete striker who contributes selflessly all over the pitch and also scores a hatful of goals. Oliveira, who was named manager of the year, and his coaching staff deserve special credit for transforming Marqinhos into such a player.

Oliveira, who feels Antlers won a fast-improving league, said: "It isn't easy to win twice in a row and I'll remember this championship for the rest of my life. But it isn't only Antlers.

"Trinita were superb in the Nabisco Cup, and Gamba in the Asian Champions League and again in their third-place match in the FIFA Club World Cup. We have seen the progress of Japanese football."

Antlers had three players named in the J.League's best XI, with Daiki Iwamasa being picked for the second year in a row, alongside 20-year old Atsuto Uchida and Marquinhos.

The best XI was: Seigo Narazaki (Grampus), Iwamasa (Antlers), Uchida (Antlers), Tulio (Reds), Yuji Nakazawa (Marinos), Satoshi Yamaguchi (Gamba), Kengo Nakamura (Frontale), Yoshizumi Ogawa (Grampus), Yasuhito Endo (Gamba), Marquinhos (Antlers) and Atsushi Yanagisawa (Sanga). Ogawa was also named the season's best new player.

Kawasaki Frontale were flying at the end of the season. Ten goals and nine points from their last three games took them into second place for the first time on the final day, but it still wasn't enough to catch Antlers, who eked out steady 1-0 wins in each of their last three outings.

Frontale's fantastic finish after a rocky start to the season saw them secure a place in the AFC Champions League, along with Antlers and Dragan Stojkovic's Nagoya Grampus, who came third. Japan's fourth Champions League spot went to Gamba Osaka, who won the Emperor's Cup on New Year's Day.

However, there is one very big name who will be missing from this year's Champions League tournament – Urawa Reds. A late collapse cost them the title last season and they failed at the finish again this time. Losses in their last three league matches pushed Japan's biggest club down to seventh spot, their lowest position since 2002.

Mike Plastow

It's us again...Toru Araiba leads his team-mates' celebrations after Antlers retained the J.League title

Better beware...Brebner (right) was banned for wager

AUSTRALIA

Trio hit by gambling fines

THREE PROMINENT A.League players were disciplined after betting on matches in a breach of Football Federation Australia regulations.

Kevin Muscat and Craig Moore, the captains of Melbourne Victory and Queensland Roar respectively, were each fined £730 for gambling on fixtures not involving their teams.

Victory's Grant Brebner received the same fine, but he was also suspended for two weeks for putting money on a match that featured his own side, even though it was a game in which he did not appear.

Former Reading, Hibernian and Dundee United midfielder Brebner, whose gambling problems have been well documented, reportedly gained £35 through three transactions with a bookmaker, while Moore was £17 to the good after two flutters. Muscat, however, lost £25 on a single punt.

The initial round of Brebner's suspension coincided with his team's third successive defeat, a 4-2 loss at bottom club Newcastle Jets, and the consequent surrender of a six-point lead at the top of the table.

Despite his betting misadventure and earlier testicular-cancer surgery, Moore is enjoying an outstanding season, as are team-mates and fellow veterans Danny Tiatto and Charlie Miller.

Although Tiatto's disciplinary record remains woeful and former Scotland international Miller's fitness levels continue to be the subject of much speculation, if Queensland's "Three Wise Men" retain their form they have a realistic chance of a first title.

Paul Moon

CHINA

Shandong reclaim title

Shandong Luneng defied the odds on the final day of the Chinese Super League season to pip Shanghai Shenhua to the title despite drawing 0-0 with Guangzhou.

Shandong needed to match Shanghai's result in the last round of matches to reclaim the title after losing out to Changchun Yatai last season.

Perennial underachievers Shanghai finally seemed destined for some success when they led Zhejiang 2-1 with 14 minutes remaining.

However, Tan Yang struck to level the scores for Zhejiang and hand Shandong the title for the second time in three seasons. It is their third league championship in total.

Beijing Guoan finished third with Tianjin in fourth place.

Michael Church

SOUTH KOREA

Bluewings on song

Suwon Bluewings won the K-League for a fourth time with a 3-2 aggregate victory over FC Seoul in the Final of the championship as both clubs qualified for the Asian Champions League.

Suwon, coached by former national team boss Cha Bum-kun, had claimed a vital away goal in the 1-1 draw in the first leg in Seoul as goals from Jung Jo-Gook, Song Chong-gug and Edu sealed the title.

"I didn't feel as happy as this when I first won the league in 2004 because I wasn't able to do as I wanted as a new coach," said Cha, who was voted coach of the year.

Suwon goalkeeper Lee Woon-jae was named Most Valuable Player and his success came just months after he returned from a one-year ban for the national team following a scandal during last year's Asian Cup when he was caught drinking after a curfew.

Meanwhile, former national team midfielder Shin Tae-yong has been named coach at Seongnam Ilhwa. He was a key member of the Ilhwa team that won the Asian Club Championship in 1995 and takes over from Kim Hak-beom, who resigned after elimination from the K-League play-offs.

Michael Church

Cheers...Lee was the K-League's MVP

ROUND-UP

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

ASIA

● Jeddah-based Al-Ahli beat Al-Nasr 3-0 on aggregate to win the Gulf Clubs Championship in SAUDI ARABIA. Al Raheb and Al Kharashi scored for Al-Ahli in the second leg of the Final. Al Raheb had also been on target in the first leg.

● Hashim Saleh emerged the hero as Al-Suwaiq stunned Al-Nahda to win His Majesty's Cup in OMAN. The diminutive striker scored the decider in the 79th minute.

● In the PHILIPPINES, Philippine Army beat Giligan's 2-0 to lift the Filipino Premiere League title in what will be the last tournament using the current format before AFC's Vision Asia ideals kick in next season.

● In the Final of INDIA's Federation Cup, Mohun Bagan beat Dempo with a solitary goal from Brazilian striker Jose Ramirez Barreto.

● Regar-TadAZ defeated Khujand 3-1 and Guardia 2-0 to retain the League title in TAJIKISTAN with three matches to spare. This was Regar's seventh league title since 2001.

Azam Mahmood

OCEANIA

● TAHITI will make their debut at the finals of a FIFA tournament after winning the Oceania Under-20 championship on home soil. Their triumph included a 2-1 victory over favourites New Zealand. The young Tahitians, who are coached by the former France international goalkeeper Lionel Charbonnier, will compete at the Under-20 World Cup in July.

● Nadroga retained their top-tier status in FIJI with a 3-2 aggregate win over second division champions Tailevu-Naitasiri in this year's promotion-relegation play-off.

● Waikato, who almost failed to start the season in NEW ZEALAND because of financial difficulties, lead the championship, However, their advantage over second-placed Waitakere United is just two points and the west Auckland team have two matches in hand.

● In PAPUA NEW GUINEA, title-holders Hekari Souths United thrashed bottom club Nabasa United 6-2 and entered the mid-season break top of the table with a one-point advantage over University Inter.

Paul Moon

Making plans for the future...Non-FIFA Board members meet in Milan

Padania get the nod

THE NEXT EDITION of the Viva World Cup (VWC) for Non-FIFA (NF) teams will be held in northern Italy in the summer of 2009.

Padania secured the rights to host the third VWC after a vote at the fifth annual assembly of the organisers, the NF Board, in Milan.

NF Board secretary-general Jean-Luc Kit said: "In 2009, we hope six or eight teams [attend] and an official VWC for women. No more decisions as yet. We have to work on these elements."

The Padania team was set up by the Lega Nord political party representing northern Italy, and it is hoped that the Final of the 2009 VWC will be staged at the San Siro in Milan. Other matches could be held in a variety of locations, with Bergamo, Como, Lecco, Monza, Varese and Verona all in the running, depending on the number of entrants.

Padania were winners of the second VWC in Gellivare in Swedish Samiland – more commonly known as Lapland – in July 2008. The event attracted five teams and was a closer competition than the first tournament, held in Occitania in 2006, which took the NF Board close to a decade to organise and was plagued by withdrawals and one-sided games. Only four teams ending up taking part, and the Sami beat Monaco 21-1 in the Final.

Padania, the French region of Provence, Iraqi Kurdistan and a team representing the Arameac minority in Sweden competed in the 2008 VWC and all were admitted to the NF Board at the Milan assembly. The Maltese island of Gozo and an association representing Wallonia in Belgium were also invited to join.

How many of these teams will compete in northern Italy later this year is hard to gauge at present. The Sami and Monaco are expected to travel, but money is an enduring problem for most sides.

Gozo had promised to take a strong side, including Malta international Daniel Bogdanovic, to Gellivare but they did not travel due to a lack of funds. The relatively short trip to Milan should help this time round and the islanders will be keen to attend in order to build relations with other teams before they host the tournament in 2010.

With Gozo, Kurdistan and Padania all having bid for the 2009 competition, the NF Board decided the VWC should be held more often and a tournament has been pencilled in for 2011 or 2012 in Kurdistan. Members of the Kurdistan FA were unable to secure visas to travel to the assembly in Milan, and secretary-general Kit commented: "We need a meeting soon with the Kurdistan FA in Paris, Brussels or Monaco."

Staging a tournament in Kurdistan will be even more problematic given concerns over the safety situation and travel costs.

The NF Board hopes that the profile of the competition, which was helped by increased TV coverage and four-figure crowds at some matches in 2008, will be raised further by 2009 and 2010, with sponsorship forthcoming to help teams wishing to travel to Kurdistan.

Steve Menary

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

INTERNATIONALS

CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALIFIERS

CARIBBEAN ZONE
Final stage*

**Tournament doubled as the Caribbean regional championship*

In Jamaica

Group A

Dec 3 - Kingston
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Glen 76)
Grenada 2 (K Bain 36, R Charles 90)
HT: 0-1

Dec 3 - Kingston
Jamaica 2 (Austin 76, Shelton pen 82)
Barbados 1 (Riviere Williams 45)
HT: 0-1

Dec 5 - Montego Bay
Barbados 1 (Goodridge 13)
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (McFarlane pen 47, pen 70)
HT: 1-1
Sent off: J M Williams (Barbados) 69min

Dec 5 - Montego Bay
Jamaica 4 (Vernan 8, Shelton 16, A Williams 52, Phillips 88)
Grenada 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 7 - Trelawny
Grenada 4 (K Bain 11, 26, 66, Julien 20)
Barbados 2 (N Forde 70, Riviere Williams 78)
HT: 3-0

Dec 7 - Trelawny
Jamaica 1 (Vernan 46)
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (McFarlane 80)
HT: 0-0

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jamaica	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Grenada	3	2	0	1	6	7	6
Trinidad & Tob	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Barbados	3	0	0	3	4	8	0

Group B

Dec 4 - Montego Bay
Haiti 1 (Norde 53)
Antigua & Barbuda 1 (Byers 72)
HT: 0-0

Dec 4 - Montego Bay
Guadeloupe 1 (Hanany 27)
Cuba 2 (Fernandez 8, Linares 74)
HT: 1-1

Dec 6 - Trelawny
Haiti 2 (Boucicaut 43, Edneron 68)
Guadeloupe 3 (Antoine-Curier 14, Nicoise 17, Lambourde 90)
HT: 1-2

Dec 6 - Trelawny
Cuba 3 (Marquez 7, Linares 21, Jaime Colome 35)
Antigua & Barbuda 0
HT: 3-0
Sent off: R Christian (Antigua & Barbuda) 80min

Dec 8 - Montego Bay
Cuba 0
Haiti 1 (Boucicaut 37)
HT: 0-1

Dec 8 - Montego Bay
Antigua & Barbuda 2 (Byers 35, 82)
Guadeloupe 2 (Antoine-Curier 1, Gendrey 47)
HT: 1-1

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cuba	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Guadeloupe	3	1	1	1	6	6	4
Haiti	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Antigua & B	3	0	2	1	3	6	2

Semi-finals

Dec 11 - Kingston
Cuba 2 (Joel Colome 14, Linares 33)
Grenada 2 (R Charles pen 12, K Bain 86)
HT: 2-1
Grenada 6-5 on pens

Dec 11 - Kingston
Jamaica 2 (Thompson 11, Shelton 67)
Guadeloupe 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Vidian (Guadeloupe) 82min

Third-place play-off

Dec 14 - Kingston
Cuba 0
Guadeloupe 0
Guadeloupe 5-4 on pens

Final

Dec 14 - Kingston
Jamaica 2 (Shelton pen 17, pen 70)
Grenada 0
HT: 1-0

Jamaica, Grenada, Guadeloupe and Cuba qualify for the CONCACAF Gold Cup

AFF CHAMPIONSHIP

(ASEAN Football Federation)

Group A

In Indonesia

Dec 5 - Jakarta
Singapore 5 (Casmir 45, 73, Fahrudin pen 60, Daud 70, Noh Alam Shah 90)
Cambodia 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 5 - Jakarta
Indonesia 3 (Budi 26, Firman 29, Bambang 65)
Myanmar 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 7 - Jakarta
Singapore 3 (Noh Alam Shah 2, Casmir 17, 75)
Myanmar 1 (Myo Min Tun 30)
HT: 2-1
Sent off: Aung Aung Oo (Myanmar) 74min

Dec 7 - Jakarta
Cambodia 0
Indonesia 4 (Budi 16, 55, 71, Bambang 76)
HT: 0-1

Dec 9 - Bandung
Myanmar 3 (Moe Win 30, Yazar Win Thein 35, Myo Min Tun 85)
Cambodia 2 (Sokumpheak 40, Borey 77)
HT: 2-1

Dec 9 - Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Singapore 2 (Khaizan 2, Shi Jiayi 50)
HT: 0-1

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Singapore	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Indonesia	3	2	0	1	7	2	6
Myanmar	3	1	0	2	4	8	3
Cambodia	3	0	0	3	2	12	0

Group B

In Thailand

Dec 6 - Phuket
Malaysia 3 (Safee 68, 90, Indra Putra 72)
Laos 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 6 - Phuket
Thailand 2 (Sutee 34, Suchao 45)
Vietnam 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 8 - Phuket
Malaysia 2 (Indra Putra 20, 85)
Vietnam 3 (Pham Thanh Luong 16, Nguyen Vu Phong 72, 88)
HT: 1-1

Dec 8 - Phuket
Laos 0
Thailand 6 (Ronnachai 20, Patiparn 30, Arthit 40, 52, Anon 79, 89)
HT: 0-3

Dec 10 - Phuket
Thailand 3 (Sutee 20, Teerasil 47, 75)
Malaysia 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 10 - Phuket
Vietnam 4 (Nguyen Viet Thang 48, Pham Thanh Luong 63, Huynh Quang Thanh 66, Phan Thanh Binh 81)
Laos 0
HT: 0-0

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thailand	3	3	0	0	11	0	9
Vietnam	3	2	0	1	7	4	6
Malaysia	3	1	0	2	5	6	3
Laos	3	0	0	3	0	13	0

Semi-finals, 1st legs

Dec 16 - Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Thailand 1 (Teerasil 5)
HT: 0-1

Dec 17 - Hanoi
Vietnam 0
Singapore 0

Semi-finals, 2nd legs

Dec 20 - Bangkok
Thailand 2 (Teerathep 72, Ronnachai 88)
Indonesia 1 (Arianto 9)
HT: 0-1
Thailand 3-1 on agg

Dec 21 - Singapore
Singapore 0
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Quang Hai 75)
HT: 0-0
Vietnam 1-0 on agg

Final, 1st leg

Dec 24 - Bangkok
Thailand 1 (Ronnachai 75)
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Vu Phong 40, Le Cong Vinh 42)
HT: 0-2

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 28 - Hanoi
Vietnam 1 (Le Cong Vinh 90)
Thailand 1 (Teerasil 21)
HT: 0-1
Vietnam 3-2 on agg

OMAN FOUR-NATIONS TOURNAMENT

In Muscat

Semi-finals

Dec 16
Iran 0
Ecuador 1 (Martinez 56)
HT: 0-0

Dec 16
Oman 3 (Saleh 48, 84, Bashir 74)
China 1 (Qu Bo 53)
HT: 0-0

Third-place play-off

Dec 19
Iran 2 (Seyed Salehi pen 45, Noori 72)
China 0
HT: 1-0

Final

Dec 19
Oman 2 (Rabea 3, Al-Hosni 75)
Ecuador 0
HT: 1-0

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, December 14

Dec 14 - Antalya, Turkey
Serbia 0
Poland 1 (Boguski 52)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 100. **Ref:** Dereli (Tur)
Serbia: Isailovic (Stojkovic 46) - Vulicevic, Duric, Tomovic, Obradovic (Pejcinovic 34), Mutavdzic, Milijas (Zajic 46), Tadic (Lazovic 46), Matic, Aleksic (Mrda 46), Bogunovic (Jevtic 58).
Poland: Przyrowski - Celeban (Rzezniczak 56), Polczak, Komorowski, Jodlowiec, Lukasiewicz (Pawlowski 56), Tralka, Tyrala (Krychowiak 56), Malkowski (Danch 82), Janczyk (Zahorski 67), Boguski (Zielinski 82).

Sunday, December 21

Dec 21 - Amman
Jordan 0
China 1 (Cao Yang 77)
HT: 0-0

Monday, December 22

Dec 22 - Muscat
Oman 1 (Al-Maymani 78)
Senegal 0
HT: 0-0

Tuesday, December 23

Dec 23 - Manama
Bahrain 1 (Salman 51)
Saudi Arabia 0
HT: 0-0

Saturday, December 27

Dec 27 - Dammam
Saudi Arabia 1 (Hawsawi 22)
Syria 1 (Rafe 50)
HT: 1-0

Dec 27 - Al Ain
United Arab Emirates 2 (Omar 49, Khamis 82)
Iraq 2 (Nasser 43, Rehema 86)
HT: 0-1

Monday, December 29

Dec 29 - Manama
Bahrain 2 (Isa 49, Al-Dakheel 88)
Syria 2 (Hasan og 41, Al-Zeno 68)
HT: 0-1

Tuesday, December 30

Dec 30 - Dubai
United Arab Emirates 0
Kuwait 0

ASIAN CUP 2011

Qualifying draw & schedule

Group A

Bahrain
Hong Kong
Japan
Yemen

20.01.09	Japan-Yemen
21.01.09	Hong Kong-Bahrain
28.01.09	Bahrain-Japan
28.01.09	Yemen-Hong Kong
14.11.09	Japan-Hong Kong
14.11.09	Yemen-Bahrain
18.11.09	Bahrain-Yemen
18.11.09	Hong Kong-Japan
06.01.10	Bahrain-Hong Kong
06.01.10	Yemen-Japan
03.03.10	Hong Kong-Yemen
03.03.10	Japan-Bahrain

Group B

Australia
Indonesia
Kuwait
Oman

19.01.09	Oman-Indonesia
28.01.09	Indonesia-Australia
28.01.09	Kuwait-Oman
05.03.09	Australia-Kuwait
14.11.09	Australia-Oman
14.11.09	Kuwait-Indonesia
18.11.09	Indonesia-Kuwait
18.11.09	Oman-Australia
06.01.10	Indonesia-Oman
06.01.10	Kuwait-Australia
03.03.10	Australia-Indonesia
03.03.10	Oman-Kuwait

Group C

Malaysia
United Arab Emirates
Uzbekistan

21.01.09	Malaysia-UAE
28.01.09	UAE-Uzbekistan
14.11.09	Uzbekistan-Malaysia
18.11.09	Malaysia-Uzbekistan
06.01.10	UAE-Malaysia
03.03.10	Uzbekistan-UAE

Group D

China
Lebanon
Syria
Vietnam

14.01.09	Syria-China
14.01.09	Vietnam-Lebanon
21.01.09	China-Vietnam
28.01.09	Lebanon-Syria
14.11.09	Lebanon-China
14.11.09	Vietnam-Syria
18.11.09	Syria-Vietnam
22.11.09	China-Lebanon
06.01.10	China-Syria
06.01.10	Lebanon-Vietnam
17.01.10	Vietnam-China
03.03.10	Syria-Lebanon

Group E

Iran
Jordan
Singapore
Thailand

14.01.09	Iran-Singapore
14.01.09	Jordan-Thailand
28.01.09	Singapore-Jordan
28.01.09	Thailand-Iran
14.11.09	Iran-Jordan
14.11.09	Singapore-Thailand
18.11.09	Jordan-Iran
18.11.09	Thailand-Singapore
06.01.10	Singapore-Iran
06.01.10	Thailand-Jordan
03.03.10	Iran-Thailand
03.03.10	Jordan-Singapore

Top two in each group qualify for the 16-team finals. Hosts Qatar qualify automatically, as do the best three sides from the 2007 Asian Cup finals – winners Iraq, runners-up Saudi Arabia and third-placed South Korea – and the winners of the AFC Challenge Cup in 2008 (India) and 2010

CLUB FOOTBALL WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

In Japan

Preliminary round

Dec 11 - Tokyo
Adelaide United (Aus) 2 (Mullen 39, Dodd 83)
Waitakere United (NZ) 1 (Seaman 34)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 19,777. **Ref:** Benouza (Alg)
Adelaide: Galekovic - Cornthwaite, Costanzo, Jamieson, Mullen, Sarkies (Younis 70), Dodd, Barbiero, Spagnuolo (Alemao 58), Reid, Cristiano.
Waitakere: Gillespie - Perry, Emblen, Rowley, Seaman (Totori 85), Pearce (Pimenta 75), Sykes, Bale, Butler, Krishna, Koprivic (Vincent 67).

Quarter-finals

Dec 13 - Tokyo
Al Ahly (Egy) 2 (Pinto og 28, Flavio 45)
Pachuca (Mex) 4 (Montes 47, Gimenez 73, 110, Alvarez 98)
Aet. **HT:** 2-0. **90mins:** 2-2. **Att:** 30,158.
Ref: Irmatov (Uzb)
Al Ahly: Abdelhamid - El Sayed, Mohamed, Gomaa, Fathi (Moawad 91), Barakat, Ashour, Gilberto (Yasser 97), Hassan (Sedik 77), Aboutraika, Flavio.
Pachuca: Calero - Lopez, Manzur, Rodriguez, Pinto (Montes 46), Aguilar, J Correa (Rojas 46), Torres (Cardenas 70), Alvarez, Marioni, Gimenez.

Dec 14 - Toyota
Adelaide United 0
Gamba Osaka (Jap) 1 (Endo 23)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 38,141. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Adelaide: Galekovic - Cornthwaite, Cassio (Alemao 71), Jamieson, Mullen, Ognenovski, Dodd, Barbiero, Diego (Younis 88), Reid, Cristiano (Malik 77).
Gamba: Fujigaya - Nakazawa, Yamaguchi, Kaji, Endo, Futagawa (Takei 84), Yasuda, Sasaki (Bando 20; Yamazaki 81), Myojin, Hashimoto, Lucas.

Byes to semi-finals:
LDU Quito (Ecu), Manchester United (Eng)

Semi-finals

Dec 17 - Tokyo
Pachuca 0
LDU Quito 2 (Bieler 4, Bolanos 26)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 33,366. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Pachuca: Calero - Lopez, Manzur, Rojas, Pinto, J Correa (Montes 46), Cardenas (Aguilar 46), Torres (Rodriguez 67), Alvarez, Marioni, Gimenez.
LDU: Cevallos - N Araujo, Calle, Reasco (Larrea 90), Calderon, Campos, Bolanos, Urrutia, W Araujo, Manso, Bieler (Navia 78).

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Gamba Osaka 3 (Yamazaki 74, Endo pen 85, Hashimoto 90)
Manchester United 5 (Vidic 28, Cristiano Ronaldo 45, Rooney 75, 79, Fletcher 78)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 67,618. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Gamba: Fujigaya - Nakazawa, Yamaguchi, Kaji, Endo, Yasuda, Myojin, Hashimoto, Lucas, Bando (Terada 85), Yamazaki.
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Neville, Ferdinand, Vidic (Evans 70), Evra, Nani, Anderson, Scholes (Fletcher 68), Giggs, Cristiano Ronaldo, Tevez (Rooney 74).

Fifth-place play-off

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Al Ahly 0
Adelaide United 1 (Cristiano 7)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 35,154. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)
Al Ahly: Abdelhamid - Mohamed, Moawad, Adel, Gomaa, Barakat, Hassan (Yasser 46), Fathi, Ashour, Aboutraika (Hosny 46), Flavio (Elagizy 67).
Adelaide: Galekovic - Cornthwaite, Alemao, Jamieson, Mullen (Marrone 54), Ognenovski, Sarkies, Diego (Salley 24), Reid, Cristiano, Younis (Malik 75).

Third-place play-off

Dec 21 - Yokohama
Pachuca 0
Gamba Osaka 1 (Yamazaki 29)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 62,619. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Pachuca: Calero - Lopez, Perez, Rodriguez, Aguilar, J Correa, Caballero (Manon 74), Cardenas (Torres 46), Alvarez (Montes 51), C Correa, Gimenez.
Gamba: Fujigaya - Nakazawa, Yamaguchi, Kaji, Endo, Yasuda, Myojin, Hashimoto, Lucas (Takei 77), Bando (Futagawa 64), Yamazaki. *Sent off: Futagawa 90min.*

Final

Dec 21 - Yokohama
Manchester United 1 (Rooney 72)
LDU Quito 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 68,682. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Rafael (Neville 85), Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra, Cristiano Ronaldo, Carrick, Anderson (Fletcher 88), Park, Tevez (Evans 60), Rooney. *Sent off: Vidic 48min.*
LDU: Cevallos - W Araujo, Calle (Ambrosi 77), Campos, Calderon, Reasco (Larrea 83), Urrutia, N Araujo, Manso, Bolanos (Navia 88), Bieler.

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Dec 9
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Kalou 40, Drogba 71)
CFR Cluj (Rom) 1 (Y Kone 55)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 41,060. **Ref:** Frojdfeldt (Swe)
Chelsea: Cech - Bosingwa, Alex, Terry, A Cole, Mikel (Bridge 87), Kalou (Drogba 64), Deco, Ballack, J Cole (Belletti 74), Anelka.
CFR: Nuno Claro - Panin, Alcantara, Cadu, Pereira, Muresan, Dani, Culio, Trica (Peralta 72), Dubarbier (E Kone 59), Y Kone.

Dec 9
Roma (Ita) 2 (Brighi 61, Totti 79)
Bordeaux (Fra) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,926. **Ref:** Fandel (Ger)
Roma: Doni - Panucci, Mexes, Juan, Riise, Perrotta (Pizarro 89), De Rossi, Brighi, Julio Baptista, Menez (Cicinho 80), Totti (Vucinic 87).
Bordeaux: Rame - Chaime, Planus, Diawara, Jurietti, Fernando, Diarra, Gouffran (Cavenaghi 58), Gourcuff, Wendel (Bellion 69), Chamakh (Jussie 69).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma	6	4	0	2	12	6	12
Chelsea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Bordeaux	6	2	1	3	5	11	7
CFR	6	1	1	4	5	9	4

Sep 16	Chelsea-Bordeaux 4-0
Sep 16	Roma-CFR Cluj 1-2
Oct 1	Bordeaux-Roma 1-3
Oct 1	CFR Cluj-Chelsea 0-0
Oct 22	Bordeaux-CFR Cluj 1-0
Oct 22	Chelsea-Roma 1-0
Nov 4	CFR Cluj-Bordeaux 1-2
Nov 4	Roma-Chelsea 3-1
Nov 26	Bordeaux-Chelsea 1-1
Nov 26	CFR Cluj-Roma 1-3
Dec 9	Chelsea-CFR Cluj 2-1
Dec 9	Roma-Bordeaux 2-0

Group B

Dec 9
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Karagounis 69)
Anorthosis (Cyp) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 59,872. **Ref:** Layec (Fra)
Panathinaikos: Galinovic - Vyntra, Goumas, Sarriegi, Spyropoulos, Gilberto Silva, Simao, Tziolis, Cleyton (Salpigidis 65), Karagounis (Ivanschitz 90), Mantzios (Rukavina 82).
Anorthosis: Beqaj (Nagy 46) - A Constantinou, Dellas (Frousos 46), Katsavakis, Leiwakabessy, Skopelitis, Dobrasinovic, Bardon, Nicolaou, Laban, Taher (Paulo Costa 70).

Dec 9
Werder Bremen (Ger) 2 (Pizarro 63, Rosenberg 81)
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Ibrahimovic 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Vink (Hol)
Werder: Wiese - Fritz, Mertesacker, Prodl, Boenisch, Frings, Vranjes (Niemeyer 89), Hunt, Ozil (Jensen 90), Rosenberg, Pizarro.
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Materazzi (Maxwell 46), Cordoba, Burdisso, Zanetti, Cambiasso, Muntari (Balotelli 71), Mancini, Adriano (Ibrahimovic 46), Ricardo Quaresma.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Inter	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Werder	6	1	4	1	7	9	7
Anorthosis	6	1	3	2	8	8	6

Sep 16	Panathinaikos-Internazionale .. 0-2
Sep 16	Werder-Anorthosis 0-0
Oct 1	Anorthosis-Panathinaikos 3-1
Oct 1	Internazionale-Werder 1-1
Oct 22	Internazionale-Anorthosis 1-0
Oct 22	Panathinaikos-Werder 2-2
Nov 4	Anorthosis-Internazionale 3-3
Nov 4	Werder-Panathinaikos 0-3
Nov 26	Anorthosis-Werder 2-2
Nov 26	Internazionale-Panathinaikos .. 0-1
Dec 9	Panathinaikos-Anorthosis 1-0
Dec 9	Werder-Internazionale 2-1

Group C

Dec 9
Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Silvinho 60, Busquets 83)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 3 (Gladkyy 31, 57, Fernandinho 75)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 22,763. **Ref:** Riley (Eng)
Barcelona: Jorquera - Caceres, Pique, Victor Sanchez, Silvinho, Victor Vazquez, Busquets, Keita, Pedro (Gudjohnsen 76), Bojan, Hleb.
Shakhtar: Pyatov - Srna, Kucher, Chygrynskyi, Rat, Fernandinho (Luiz Adriano 77), Hubschman, Jadson (Brandao 66), Willian, Gai, Gladkyy.

Dec 9
Basle (Swi) 0
Sporting Lisbon (Por) 1 (Yannick 19)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,248. **Ref:** Allaerts (Blg)
Basle: Costanzo - Morganella, Ferati, Marque, Safari, Ergic, Huggel, Carlitos, Frei (Perovic 78), Chipperfield (Stocker 46), Streller (Derdiyok 66).
Sporting: Tiago - Bruno Pereirinha (Adrien Silva 46), Daniel Carrico, Anderson Polga, Caneira, Izmailov, Rochemback (Miguel Veloso 73), Vukcevic (Abel 45), Joao Moutinho, Yannick, Derlei.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	4	1	1	18	8	13
Sporting	6	4	0	2	8	8	12
Shakhtar	6	3	0	3	11	7	9
Basle	6	0	1	5	2	16	1

Sep 16	Barcelona-Sporting Lisbon 3-1
Sep 16	Basle-Shakhtar Donetsk 1-2
Oct 1	Shakhtar Donetsk-Barcelona ... 1-2
Oct 1	Sporting Lisbon-Basle 2-0
Oct 22	Basle-Barcelona 0-5
Oct 22	Shakhtar-Sporting Lisbon 0-1
Nov 4	Barcelona-Basle 1-1
Nov 4	Sporting Lisbon-Shakhtar 1-0
Nov 26	Shakhtar Donetsk-Basle 5-0
Nov 26	Sporting Lisbon-Barcelona 2-5
Dec 9	Barcelona-Shakhtar Donetsk ... 2-3
Dec 9	Basle-Sporting Lisbon 0-1

Group D

Dec 9
Marseille (Fra) 0
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0
Att: 49,663. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Marseille: Mandanda - Bonnart, Zubar, Hilton, Taiwo, Ziani (Kabore 78), Cana, Ben Arfa, Zenden, Kone (Cheyrou 80), Samassa (Valbuena 29).
Atletico: Coupet - Seitaridis, Pablo, Perea, Antonio Lopez, Rodriguez (Maniche 61), Banega, Raul Garcia, Luis Garcia (Miguel 77), Aguero (Forlan 56), Sinama-Pongolle.

Dec 9
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 1 (Lazovic 36)
Liverpool (Eng) 3 (Babel 45, Riera 69, Ngog 78)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 33,500. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)
PSV: Isaksson - Culina, Marcellis, Brechet, Salcido, Mendez (Manco 80), Simons, Bakkal (Nijland 83), Dzsudzsak, Lazovic, Amrabat (Koevermans 72).
Liverpool: Diego Cavalieri - Arbeloa (Darby 69), Agger, Carragher (Kelly 82), Dossena, Babel, Lucas, Mascherano, Riera (Spearing 76), Ngog, Keane.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	6	4	2	0	11	5	14
Atletico	6	3	3	0	9	4	12
Marseille	6	1	1	4	5	7	4
PSV	6	1	0	5	5	14	3

Sep 16	Marseille-Liverpool 1-2
Sep 16	PSV-Atletico Madrid 0-3
Oct 1	Atletico Madrid-Marseille 2-1
Oct 1	Liverpool-PSV 3-1
Oct 22	Atletico Madrid-Liverpool 1-1
Oct 22	PSV-Marseille 2-0
Nov 4	Liverpool-Atletico Madrid 1-1
Nov 4	Marseille-PSV 3-0
Nov 26	Atletico Madrid-PSV 2-1
Nov 26	Liverpool-Marseille 1-0
Dec 9	Marseille-Atletico Madrid 0-0
Dec 9	PSV-Liverpool 1-3

Group E

Dec 10
Celtic (Sco) 2 (Maloney 14, McGeady 45)
Villarreal (Spa) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 58,014. **Ref:** Circhetta (Swi)
Celtic: Boruc - Hinkel, Caldwell, McManus, Wilson (O'Dea 82), Nakamura, S Brown, Hartley, McGeady (McGowan 76), Samaras (McDonald 82), Maloney.
Villarreal: Viera - Angel, Fuentes, Rodriguez, Bruno, Cani, Senna (Nihat 46), Edmilson, Fernandez, Ibagaza (Cazorla 61), Franco.
Sent off: Franco 35min.

Dec 10
Manchester United (Eng) 2 (Tevez 3, Rooney 52)
AaB Aalborg (Den) 2 (Jakobsen 31, Curth 45)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 74,382. **Ref:** Duhamel (Fra)
Man Utd: Kuszczak - Neville (Rafael 77), Ferdinand, Evans, O'Shea, Nani, Gibson (Park 46), Anderson, Giggs (Scholes 46), Tevez, Rooney.
AaB: Zaza - Bogelund, Olfers, Jakobsen, Pedersen (Sorensen 76), Curth (Caca 75), Enevoldsen, Augustinussen, Risgard, Due (Kristensen 66), Saganowski.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	6	2	4	0	9	3	10
Villarreal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
AaB	6	1	3	2	9	14	6
Celtic	6	1	2	3	4	7	5

Sep 17	Celtic-AaB 0-0
Sep 17	Manchester United-Villarreal ... 0-0
Sep 30	AaB-Manchester United 0-3
Sep 30	Villarreal-Celtic 1-0
Oct 21	Manchester United-Celtic 3-0
Oct 21	Villarreal-AaB 6-3
Nov 5	AaB-Villarreal 2-2
Nov 5	Celtic-Manchester United 1-1
Nov 25	AaB-Celtic 2-1

Nov 25	Villarreal-Manchester United	0-0
Dec 10	Celtic-Villarreal	2-0
Dec 10	Manchester United-AaB	2-2

Group F

Dec 10

Lyon (Fra) 2 (Govou 52, Benzema 68)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 3 (Klose 12, 37, Ribery 34)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 38,349. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Lyon: Lloris - Gassama (Kallstrom 64), Mensah, Boumsong, Grosso, Toulalan, Makoun, Govou, Ederson (Delgado 77), Mounier (Fred 64), Benzema.
Bayern: Rensing - Oddo (Breno 90), Demichelis, Van Buyten, Lahm, Van Bommel, Borowski, Schweinsteiger (Altintop 88), Ribery, Klose (Ottl 69), Toni.

Dec 10

Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 0
Fiorentina (Ita) 1 (Gilardino 66)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,862. **Ref:** Medina Cantalejo (Spa)
Steaua: Zapata - Golanski, Baciu, Radoi, Marin, Petre, Tiago Gomes (Plesan 88), Nicolita, Moreno, Toja, Semedo (Lovin 56). *Sent off: Golanski 72min.*
Fiorentina: Frey - Zauri, Gamberini, Kroldrup, Vargas, Donadel, Felipe Melo, Montolivo (Masi 90), Santana (Almiron 78), Gilardino (Osvaldo 83), Mutu.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	6	4	2	0	12	4	14
Lyon	6	3	2	1	14	10	11
Fiorentina	6	1	3	2	5	8	6
Steaua	6	0	1	5	3	12	1

Sep 17	Lyon-Fiorentina	2-2
Sep 17	Steaua-Bayern Munich	0-1
Sep 30	Bayern Munich-Lyon	1-1
Sep 30	Fiorentina-Steaua	0-0
Oct 21	Bayern Munich-Fiorentina	3-0
Oct 21	Steaua-Lyon	3-5
Nov 5	Fiorentina-Bayern Munich	1-1
Nov 5	Lyon-Steaua	2-0
Nov 25	Bayern Munich-Steaua	3-0
Nov 25	Fiorentina-Lyon	1-2
Dec 10	Lyon-Bayern Munich	2-3
Dec 10	Steaua-Fiorentina	0-1

Group G

Dec 10

Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) 1 (Eremenko 20)
Fenerbahce (Tur) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Meyer (Ger)
Dynamo: Bogush - Betao, Diakhate, Mikhalik, Nesmachnyi, Vukojevic, Ghioane, Cernat (Asatiani 46), Eremenko, Bangoura (Kravets 55; Zozulya 90), Milevskyi.
Fenerbahce: Volkan Demirel - Gokhan, Edu Dracena, Lugano, Roberto Carlos, Selcuk (Maldonado 59), Josico, Deivid, Alex (Ali 65), Ugur (Ilhan 73), Guiza. *Sent off: Maldonado 90min.*

Dec 10

Porto (Por) 2 (Bruno Alves 39, Lopez 54)
Arsenal (Eng) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 37,602. **Ref:** Vassaras (Gre)
Porto: Helton - Fucile, Rolando, Bruno Alves, Pedro Emanuel, L Gonzalez (Tomas Costa 78), Fernando, Raul Meireles, Lopez, Hulk (Guarin 88), Rodriguez (M Gonzalez 78).
Arsenal: Almunia - Eboue, Gallas, Djourou, Silvestre, Ramsey (Wilshere 59), Diaby (Gibbs 60), Song (Randall 79), Denilson, Vela, Bendtner.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	6	4	0	2	9	8	12
Arsenal	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
Dynamo	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
Fenerbahce	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Sep 17	Dynamo Kyiv-Arsenal	1-1
Sep 17	Porto-Fenerbahce	3-1
Sep 30	Arsenal-Porto	4-0
Sep 30	Fenerbahce-Dynamo Kyiv	0-0
Oct 21	Fenerbahce-Arsenal	2-5
Oct 21	Porto-Dynamo Kyiv	0-1
Nov 5	Arsenal-Fenerbahce	0-0
Nov 5	Dynamo Kyiv-Porto	1-2
Nov 25	Arsenal-Dynamo Kyiv	1-0
Nov 25	Fenerbahce-Porto	1-2
Dec 10	Dynamo Kyiv-Fenerbahce	1-0
Dec 10	Porto-Arsenal	2-0

Group H

Dec 10

Juventus (Ita) 0
BATE Borisov (Bls) 0
Att: 5,753. **Ref:** Kapitanis (Cyp)
Juventus: Manninger - Grygera, Legrottaglie, Mellberg, Molinaro, Marchionni, Zanetti, Nedved (Castiglia 90), De Ceglie, Amauri (Del Piero 57), Giovinco (Esposito 87).
BATE: Veremko - Khagush, Kazantsev, Sosnovsky, Yurevich, Sivakov, Likhtarovich (Volodko 56), Kryvets (Ermakovich 89), Bliznyuk, Stasevich (Nekhaychik 61), Rodionov.

Dec 10

Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Raul 25, 57, Robben 50)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,265. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Real Madrid: Dudek - Michel Salgado, Sergio Ramos, Cannavaro, Marcelo, Robben, Guti (Javi Garcia 52), Gago, Van der Vaart (Metzelder 46), Raul (Saviola 61), Higuain.
Zenit: Malafeev - Anyukov, Lombaerts (Dominguez 76), Krizanac, Sirl, Tymoshchuk, Denisov, Danny, Zyryanov, Pogrebnyak (Fatih 72), Arshavin (Fayzulin 46).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	6	3	3	0	7	3	12
Real Madrid	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Zenit	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
BATE	6	0	3	3	3	8	3

Sep 17	Juventus-Zenit	1-0
Sep 17	Real Madrid-BATE Borisov	2-0
Sep 30	BATE Borisov-Juventus	2-2
Sep 30	Zenit-Real Madrid	1-2
Oct 21	Juventus-Real Madrid	2-1
Oct 21	Zenit-BATE Borisov	1-1
Nov 5	BATE Borisov-Zenit	0-2
Nov 5	Real Madrid-Juventus	0-2
Nov 25	BATE Borisov-Real Madrid	0-1
Nov 25	Zenit-Juventus	0-0
Dec 10	Juventus-BATE Borisov	0-0
Dec 10	Real Madrid-Zenit	3-0

Top two in each group qualified for 1st knockout round; third-placed teams enter UEFA Cup 1st knockout round

1st knockout round draw

Arsenal v Roma*
Atletico Madrid v Porto*
Chelsea v Juventus**
Internazionale v Manchester United*
Lyon v Barcelona*
Real Madrid v Liverpool**
Sporting Lisbon v Bayern Munich**
Villarreal v Panathinaikos**

**1st legs - February 24; 2nd legs - March 11*
***1st legs - February 25; 2nd legs - March 10*

UEFA CUP

Group A

Dec 18: Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 Twente Enschede (Hol) 0; Racing Santander (Spa) 3 Manchester City (Eng) 1.

UEFA CUP – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Twente	4	2	0	2	5	8	6
PSG	4	1	2	1	7	5	5
R Santander	4	1	2	1	6	5	5
Schalke (Ger)	4	1	1	2	5	6	4

Group B

Dec 18: Benfica (Por) 0 Metalist (Ukr) 1; Olympiakos (Gre) 4 Hertha Berlin (Ger) 0.

UEFA CUP – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metalist	4	3	1	0	3	0	10
Galat'ray (Tur)	4	3	0	1	4	1	9
Olympiakos	4	2	0	2	9	3	6
Hertha Berlin	4	0	2	2	1	6	2
Benfica	4	0	1	3	2	9	1

Group C

Dec 18: Sampdoria (Ita) 1 Sevilla (Spa) 0; Stuttgart (Ger) 3 Standard Liege (Blg) 0.

UEFA CUP – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Stuttgart	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Sampdoria	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Sevilla	4	2	0	2	5	2	6
Partizan (Ser)	4	0	0	4	1	8	0

Group D

Dec 18: NEC Nijmegen (Hol) 2 Udinese (Ita) 0; Tottenham (Eng) 2 Spartak Moscow (Rus) 2.

UEFA CUP – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Udinese	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
Tottenham	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
NEC	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Spartak	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Dinamo Z (Cro)	4	1	0	3	4	9	3

Group E

Dec 17: Milan (Ita) 2 Wolfsburg (Ger) 2; Portsmouth (Eng) 3 Heerenveen (Hol) 0.

UEFA CUP – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wolfsburg	4	3	1	0	13	7	10
Milan	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Braga (Por)	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Portsmouth	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Heerenveen	4	0	0	4	3	13	0

Group F

Dec 17: Ajax (Hol) 2 Slavia Prague (Cze) 2; Hamburg (Ger) 3 Aston Villa (Eng) 1.

UEFA CUP – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hamburg	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Ajax	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Aston Villa	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Zilina (Slk)	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Slavia	4	0	2	2	2	5	2

Group G

Dec 17: Club Brugge (Blg) 0 FC Copenhagen (Den) 1; Saint-Etienne (Fra) 2 Valencia (Spa) 2.

UEFA CUP – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saint-Etienne	4	2	2	0	9	4	8
Valencia	4	1	3	0	8	4	6
Copenhagen	4	1	2	1	4	5	5
Club Brugge	4	0	3	1	2	3	3
Ros'borg (Nor)	4	0	2	2	1	8	2

Group H

Dec 17: Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 1 Nancy (Fra) 0; Feyenoord (Hol) 0 Lech Poznan (Pol) 1.

UEFA CUP – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA (Rus)	4	4	0	0	12	5	12
Dep Coruna	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Lech	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Nancy	4	1	1	2	8	7	4
Feyenoord	4	0	0	4	1	10	0

Top three in each group qualified for 1st knockout round, in which they are joined by the third-placed sides from the eight Champions League groups

1st knockout round draw

AaB Aalborg v Deportivo La Coruna
Aston Villa v CSKA Moscow
Bordeaux v Galatasaray
FC Copenhagen v Manchester City
Dynamo Kyiv v Valencia
Fiorentina v Ajax
Lech Poznan v Udinese
Marseille v Twente Enschede
NEC Nijmegen v Hamburg
Olympiakos v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Wolfsburg
Sampdoria v Metalist
Shakhtar Donetsk v Tottenham
Sporting Braga v Standard Liege
Werder Bremen v Milan
Zenit St Petersburg v Stuttgart

1st legs - February 18/19; 2nd legs - February 26

AUSTRIA

Dec 5: LASK 1 Sturm 0.
Dec 6: Salzburg 2 Ried 0; Altach 2 Austria Karnten 5; Kapfenberg 3 Mattersburg 1.
Dec 7: Austria Wien 2 Rapid 2.
Dec 13: Ried 3 Kapfenberg 0; Sturm 3 Altach 1; Mattersburg 0 Austria Wien 2.
Dec 14: Rapid 1 LASK 1.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	21	14	4	3	57	29	46
Rapid	22	12	6	4	55	26	42
Sturm	21	13	3	5	49	24	42
Austria Wien	22	12	6	4	35	26	42
A Karnten	20	9	5	6	32	22	32
Ried	22	9	5	8	30	26	32
LASK	22	8	1	13	22	41	25
Kapfenberg	22	5	3	14	26	49	18
Mattersburg	22	3	4	15	23	49	13
Altach	22	4	1	17	29	66	13

BELGIUM

Friday, December 5

Cercle Brugge 3 (Serebrennikov 66, De Sutter 71, 87)
Gent 1 (Olufade 85) Att: 9,438

Saturday, December 6

Anderlecht 5 (Frutos 20, Boussoufa 25, Gillet 28, Polak 50, Legear 56)
Tubize 1 (Perbet 54) Att: 23,148

Charleroi 1 (Habibou 21)
Mechelen 2 (Mununga 35, Vleminckx pen 74) Att: 7,333

Germinal Beerschot 3 (Vandenbergh 18, Malki 49, Dosunmu 73)
Mouscron 0 Att: 10,088

Mons 5 (Jarju 12, Dahmane 27, 52, Diane 61, Okkonen 83)
Dender 2 (Destorme 13, Sylla 84) Att: 3,500

Roeselare 1 (Smits 82)
Westerlo 0 Att: 4,000

Standard 1 (Mbokani 46)
Zulte Waregem 2 (Meert 62, Subotic 90) Att: 25,000

Sunday, December 7

Kortrijk 3 (Coulibaly 59, Kums 78, pen 81)
Genk 1 (Barda pen 73) Att: 5,000

Lokeren 2 (Maazou 19, Mbaye 78)
Club Brugge 0 Att: 8,638

Friday, December 12

Mechelen 2 (Mununga 47, Rossini 57)
Germinal Beerschot 1 (Wamfor 51) Att: 11,937

Saturday, December 13

Dender 1 (Sylla 13)
Lokeren 1 (Overmeire 12) Att: 4,806

Genk 1 (Vossen 87)
Charleroi 0 Att: 21,340

Gent 1 (Ruiz 14)
Kortrijk 1 (Kouyate 10) Att: 9,870

Tubize 2 (Karaca 63, Dufer 73)
Mons 1 (Jarju 65) Att: 4,000

Westerlo 1 (Farssi 62)
Cercle Brugge 2 (De Sutter 64, Iachtchouk 68) Att: 5,000

Zulte Waregem 2 (Roelandts 34, 63)
Mouscron 1 (Custovic 8) Att: 6,000

Sunday, December 14

Club Brugge 1 (Clement 83)
Standard 4 (Defour 32, De Camargo 38, Jovanovic 45, Mbokani 79) Att: 28,180

Roeselare 0
Anderlecht 3 (Legear 65, Polak 82, Goor 90) Att: 8,000

Tuesday, December 16

Kortrijk 1 (Coulibaly 37)
Zulte Waregem 0

Friday, December 19
Anderlecht 2 (Gillet 33, Legear 90)
Genk 0 Att: 23,953

Saturday, December 20
Cercle Brugge 4 (De Sutter 15, Iachtchouk 35, 50, De Smet 40)
Roeselare 3 (Betremieux 47, Sekou 53, Hietanen 83) Att: 8,675

Charleroi 2 (Miceli 41, Makiese 83)
Dender 0 Att: 7,800

Germinal Beerschot 2 (Malki 8, P Monteyne 78)
Tubize 0 Att: 10,259

Lokeren 2 (Golan 23, 85)
Mechelen 2 (Rossini 57, 87) Att: 7,600

Mons 2 (Jarju 23, Dahmane 54)
Zulte Waregem 2 (Meert 23, Coppin 65) Att: 3,000

Mouscron 5 (Sishuba 30, Custovic 41, 44, 59, Lepoint 89)
Club Brugge 1 (Akpala 5) Att: 6,900

Sunday, December 21
Kortrijk 0
Westerlo 0 Att: 6,258

Standard 2 (Dalmat 25, Dante 53)
Gent 1 (Maric 57) Att: 26,000

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	17	12	2	3	43	17	38
Standard	17	10	4	3	30	17	34
Club Brugge	17	9	4	4	29	23	31
Genk	17	9	3	5	26	22	30
Cercle Brugge	17	9	1	7	29	28	28
Westerlo	17	8	4	5	22	20	28
Mouscron	17	8	3	6	28	22	27
Lokeren	17	6	9	2	22	14	27
Z Waregem	17	7	3	7	25	23	24
Gent	17	6	5	6	33	24	23
Kortrijk	17	5	7	5	18	24	22
Charleroi	17	6	3	8	22	26	21
Mechelen	17	4	6	7	19	28	18
Mons	17	3	6	8	19	24	15
Germinal B	17	3	6	8	18	23	15
Dender	17	3	6	8	21	33	15
Tubize	17	4	2	11	20	36	14
Roeselare	17	2	4	11	13	33	10

LEADING GOALSCORERS
11 Moussa Maazou (Lokeren)
11 Dieumerci Mbokani (Standard)
10 Adnan Custovic (Mouscron)
10 Jeremy Perbet (Tubize)
9 Adekanmi Olufade (Gent)
9 Wesley Sonck (Club Brugge)

BULGARIA

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski	15	10	3	2	26	7	33
CSKA	15	9	5	1	26	12	32
Lovech	15	8	4	3	22	13	28
Cherno More	15	8	2	5	24	12	26
Sliven	15	6	6	3	20	15	24
Lok Sofia	15	6	4	5	13	13	22
Lok Mezdra	15	6	3	6	20	16	21
Slavia	15	6	2	7	18	17	20
Chernomorets	15	4	7	4	18	19	19
Pirin	15	5	3	7	15	21	18
Minyor	15	4	5	6	11	18	17
Vihren	15	5	1	9	11	18	16
Lok Plovdiv	15	3	6	6	17	24	15
Botev	15	3	6	6	14	21	15
Spartak Varna	15	2	5	8	10	23	11
Belasitsa	15	2	4	9	9	25	10

CROATIA

Dec 7: Dinamo 3 Zagreb 1; Inter 2 Varteks 3; Sesvete 3 Zadar 1; Osijek 0 Slaven 0; Rijeka 1 Cibalia 0; Sibenik 1 Hajduk 2.

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	18	12	3	3	38	17	39
Hajduk	18	12	2	4	31	17	38
Sibenik	18	8	4	6	27	16	28
Slaven	18	8	4	6	25	22	28
Rijeka	18	7	4	7	21	20	25
Varteks	18	7	3	8	25	27	24
Zagreb	18	6	6	6	19	25	24
Osijek	18	6	5	7	25	24	23
Cibalia	18	6	3	9	17	31	21
Sesvete	18	5	4	9	22	32	19
Inter	18	4	6	8	29	33	18
Zadar	18	3	4	11	13	28	13

CZECH REPUBLIC

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	16	11	4	1	37	11	37
M Boleslav	16	9	4	3	23	16	31
Ostrava	16	9	3	4	30	16	30
Sparta	16	8	3	5	27	17	27
Liberec	16	7	5	4	21	17	26
Olomouc	16	7	5	4	21	21	26
Plzen	16	5	7	4	23	19	22
Teplice	16	6	4	6	17	14	22
Jablonec	16	6	4	6	16	20	22
Brno	16	5	5	6	17	16	20
Bohemians	16	6	1	9	23	29	19
Pribram	16	5	3	8	17	21	18
C Budejovice	16	3	9	4	14	22	18
Kladno	16	3	4	9	9	27	13
Zizkov	16	3	2	11	16	26	11
Zlin	16	2	3	11	8	27	9

DENMARK

Dec 6: OB 0 Brondby 1.
Dec 7: SonderjyskE 1 Midtjylland 1; Vejle 1 Esbjerg 1; Randers 1 AaB 2; Copenhagen 5 Horsens 2.
Dec 8: Nordsjaelland 0 AGF 0.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brondby	17	12	3	2	30	13	39
Copenhagen	17	11	4	2	32	12	37
OB	17	11	2	4	32	18	35
Midtjylland	17	9	4	4	26	19	31
AGF	17	7	3	7	20	22	24
AaB	17	6	5	6	23	25	23
Randers	17	4	9	4	27	22	21
Nordsjaelland	17	4	4	9	19	27	16
SonderjyskE	17	3	6	8	14	29	15
Esbjerg	17	2	7	8	15	23	13
Vejle	17	2	6	9	12	27	12
Horsens	17	2	5	10	17	30	11

ENGLAND

Saturday, December 6
Arsenal 1 (Adebayor 16)
Wigan 0 Att: 59,317

Blackburn 1 (Santa Cruz 86)
Liverpool 3 (Xabi Alonso 69, Benayoun 79, Gerrard 90) Att: 26,920

Bolton 0
Chelsea 2 (Anelka 9, Deco 21) Att: 22,023

Fulham 1 (Bullard 27)
Manchester City 1 (Mwaruwari 6) Att: 24,012

Hull 2 (Turnbull og 80, King pen 85)
Middlesbrough 1 (Tuncay 79) Att: 24,912

Manchester United 1 (Vidic 90)
Sunderland 0 Att: 75,400

Newcastle 2 (Owen 9, 24)
Stoke 2 (Sidibe 60, Faye 90) Att: 47,422

Sunday, December 7
Everton 2 (Lescott 30, 90)
Aston Villa 3 (Sidwell 1, A Young 54, 90+) Att: 31,922

West Bromwich 1 (Greening 39)
Portsmouth 1 (Crouch 59) Att: 24,964

Monday, December 8
West Ham 0
Tottenham 2 (King 68, O'Hara 89) Att: 34,277

Saturday, December 13
Aston Villa 4 (Agbonlahor 25, 68, Davies og 40, A Young 78)
Bolton 2 (Elmander 17, Davies 86) Att: 35,134

Liverpool 2 (Gerrard 24, 32)
Hull 2 (McShane 12, Carragher og 22) Att: 43,835

Manchester City 0
Everton 1 (Cahill 90) Att: 41,344

Middlesbrough 1 (Aliadiere 29)
Arsenal 1 (Adebayor 17) Att: 27,320

Stoke 0
Fulham 0 Att: 25,287

Sunderland 4 (Jones 22, 23, Reid 39, Cisse pen 47)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 36,280

Tottenham 0
Manchester United 0 Att: 35,882

Wigan 3 (Heskey 10, Valencia 12, Cattermole 77)
Blackburn 0 Att: 18,003

Sunday, December 14
Chelsea 1 (Anelka 51)
West Ham 1 (Bellamy 33) Att: 41,675

Portsmouth 0
Newcastle 3 (Owen 51, Martins 77, Guthrie 89) Att: 19,416

Saturday, December 20
Blackburn 3 (McCarthy pen 9, 27, Roberts 18)
Stoke 0 Att: 23,004

Bolton 2 (Taylor 1, Gardner 3)
Portsmouth 1 (Crouch 20) Att: 19,884

Fulham 3 (Bullard 41, Murphy pen 54, Dempsey 59)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 23,722

Hull 1 (Barmby 19)
Sunderland 4 (Malbranque 10, Zayatte og 78, Jones 84, Cisse 90) Att: 24,917

West Ham 0
Aston Villa 1 (Neill og 78) Att: 31,353

Sunday, December 21
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 24)
Liverpool 1 (Keane 42) Att: 60,094

Newcastle 2 (N'Zogbia 12, Duff 90)
Tottenham 1 (Modric 29) Att: 47,982

West Bromwich 2 (Moore 69, Bednar 90)
Manchester City 1 (Carson og 86) Att: 25,010

Monday, December 22
Everton 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 35,655

Friday, December 26
Aston Villa 2 (Barry pen 65, Knight 90)
Arsenal 2 (Denilson 40, Diaby 49) Att: 42,585

Chelsea 2 (Drogba 3, Lampard 45)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 43,417

Liverpool 3 (Riera 26, Keane 53, 58)
Bolton 0 Att: 43,548

Manchester City 5 (Caicedo 15, 27, Robinho 28, 36, Ireland 82)
Hull 1 (Fagan 80) Att: 45,196

Middlesbrough 0
Everton 1 (Cahill 51) Att: 30,253

Portsmouth 1 (Belhadj 8)
West Ham 4 (Collison 20, Cole 67, Bellamy 70, 83) Att: 20,102

Stoke 0
Manchester United 1 (Tevez 83) Att: 27,500

Sunderland 0
Blackburn 0 Att: 44,680

Tottenham 0
Fulham 0 Att: 35,869

Wigan 2 (Taylor 29, Zaki pen 73)
Newcastle 1 (Guthrie pen 88) Att: 20,266

Sunday, December 28
Arsenal 1 (Gallas 81)
Portsmouth 0 Att: 60,092

Blackburn 2 (McCarthy 45, Roberts 84)
Manchester City 2 (Sturridge 88, Robinho 90) Att: 25,200

Bolton 0
Wigan 1 (Zaki pen 44) Att: 23,726

Everton 3 (Arteta 10, 27, Gosling 83)
Sunderland 0 Att: 39,146

Fulham 2 (Dempsey 10, 89)
Chelsea 2 (Lampard 50, 72) Att: 25,462

Newcastle 1 (Edgar 45)
Liverpool 5 (Gerrard 31, 66, Hyypia 36, Babel 50, Xabi Alonso pen 77) Att: 52,114

West Bromwich 2 (Bednar 83, Beattie 90)
Tottenham 0 Att: 26,344

West Ham 2 (Cole 51, Tristan 88)
Stoke 1 (Faye 4) Att: 34,477

Monday, December 29
Manchester United 1 (Berbatov 69)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 75,294

Tuesday, December 30
Hull 0
Aston Villa 1 (Zayatte og 88) Att: 24,727

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	20	13	6	1	35	13	45
Chelsea	20	12	6	2	40	9	42
Man Utd	18	11	5	2	29	10	38
Aston Villa	20	11	5	4	33	22	38
Arsenal	20	10	5	5	33	23	35
Everton	20	9	5	6	27	25	32
Wigan	19	8	4	7	24	21	28
Hull	20	7	6	7	28	37	27
Fulham	19	6	8	5	18	14	26
West Ham	20	7	4	9	24	28	25
Bolton	20	7	2	11	22	28	23
Portsmouth	20	6	5	9	21	33	23
Man City	20	6	4	10	38	30	22
Newcastle	20	5	7	8	26	32	22
Sunderland	20	6	4	10	21	29	22
Tottenham	20	5	5	10	20	25	20
Middlesbrough	20	5	5	10	17	29	20
Stoke	20	5	5	10	18	33	20
Blackburn	20	4	6	10	22	36	18
West Brom	20	5	3	12	16	35	18

LEADING GOALSCORERS
14 Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea)
11 Robinho (Manchester City)
10 Amr Zaki (Wigan)
9 Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa)

FA CUP – last 64

Jan 2: Tottenham 3 Wigan 1.
Jan 3: Arsenal 3 Plymouth 1; Cardiff 2 Reading 0; Charlton 1 Norwich 1; Chelsea 1 Southend 1; Coventry 2 Kidderminster 0; Forest Green 3 Derby 4; Hartlepool 2 Stoke 0; Hull 0 Newcastle 0; Ipswich 3 Chesterfield 0; Kettering 2 Eastwood 1; Leicester 0 Crystal Palace 0; Macclesfield 0 Everton 1; Manchester City 0 Nottingham Forest 3; Middlesbrough 2 Barrow 1; Millwall 2 Crewe 2; Portsmouth 0 Bristol City 0; Preston 0 Liverpool 2; Queen's Park Rangers 0 Burnley 0; Sheffield Wednesday 1 Fulham 2; Sunderland 2 Bolton 1; Torquay 1 Blackpool 0; Watford 1 Scunthorpe 0; West Bromwich 1 Peterborough 1; West Ham 3 Barnsley 0.
Jan 4: Gillingham 1 Aston Villa 2; Southampton 0 Manchester United 3.
Jan 5: Blyth 0 Blackburn 1.

Still to play: Birmingham v Wolverhampton; Cheltenham v Doncaster; Histon v Swansea; Leyton Orient v Sheffield United (all Jan 13)

FRANCE

Friday, December 5
Bordeaux 2 (Chamakh 34, Cavenaghi 47)
Valenciennes 1 (Pujol 43) Att: 18,717

Saturday, December 6
Caen 1 (Nivet 45)
Rennes 1 (Sow 76) Att: 19,084

Lille 1 (Bastos 90)
Toulouse 1 (Cetto 64) Att: 14,085

Marseille 2 (Echouafni og 14, Niang 45)
Nice 1 (Bamogo 48) Att: 50,279

Nantes 2 (Klasnic 60, pen 89)
Lyon 1 (Piquionne 43) Att: 26,624

Saint-Etienne 2 (Payet 75, Gomis 80)
Le Havre 0 Att: 24,667

Sunday, December 7

Grenoble 0
Auxerre 0 Att: 16,221

Lorient 1 (Gameiro 83)
Nancy 0 Att: 10,326

Monaco 1 (Alonso 20)
Sochaux 1 (Santos 9) Att: 6,585

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Hoarau 23, 39, Luyindula 87)
Le Mans 1 (Cerdan 31) Att: 36,545

Wednesday, December 10

Nice 0
Grenoble 0 Att: 10,064

Saturday, December 13

Auxerre 1 (Hengbart pen 87)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Sessegnon 5, 21) Att: 14,118

Le Mans 1 (Helstad 66)
Bordeaux 3 (Cavenaghi 59, Chalme 76, Jussie 90) Att: 10,499

Nancy 2 (Feret 16, Dia 66)
Grenoble 0 Att: 19,611

Rennes 0
Nantes 0 Att: 28,652

Sochaux 2 (Privat 78, 89)
Caen 2 (Gomis 21, 68) Att: 11,215

Toulouse 3 (Gignac 5, 54, Didot 45)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Paulo Machado 37) Att: 16,362

Valenciennes 3 (Carlos Sanchez 27, Belmadi 40, Pujol 59)
Monaco 1 (Pino 23) Att: 11,322

Sunday, December 14

Le Havre 1 (Dieuze 65)
Lorient 3 (Mansouri 40, Gameiro 45, Vahirua 68) Att: 12,675

Lyon 0
Marseille 0 Att: 39,638

Nice 0
Lille 1 (Bastos 7) Att: 8,662

Saturday, December 20

Caen 0
Lyon 1 (Benzema 43) Att: 20,613

Grenoble 2 (Baning 34, Paillot 47)
Le Mans 1 (Maiga 55) Att: 15,019

Lille 3 (Obraniak 31, Cabaye 82, Bastos 90)
Le Havre 1 (Alla 61) Att: 15,083

Lorient 1 (Morel 45)
Rennes 2 (Gyan 75, Sow 81) Att: 14,366

Nantes 1 (Capoue 86)
Sochaux 1 (Erdinc 70) Att: 23,416

Saint-Etienne 2 (Machado 12, Gomis 88)
Auxerre 0 Att: 26,862

Toulouse 2 (Gignac 33, 86)
Nice 2 (Modeste 8, Hognon 90) Att: 20,988

Sunday, December 21

Marseille 0
Nancy 3 (Hadji 34, 39, Dia 56) Att: 50,628

Monaco 3 (Pino 13, Licata 44, 49)
Bordeaux 4 (Chamakh 52, 87, Diarra 67, Cavenaghi 89) Att: 8,142

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Hoarau 27, Rothen 72)
Valenciennes 2 (Mater 46, Tiene 83) Att: 43,878

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	19	11	5	3	23	12	38
Bordeaux	19	10	5	4	31	19	35
Rennes	19	8	10	1	24	13	34
PSG	19	10	3	6	24	17	33
Marseille	19	8	8	3	33	24	32
Lille	19	8	8	3	28	19	32
Toulouse	19	8	7	4	19	15	31
Nice	19	8	6	5	23	19	30
Lorient	19	7	5	7	25	23	26
Nancy	19	6	7	6	18	17	25
Grenoble	19	6	7	6	13	17	25
Le Mans	19	7	3	9	25	28	24
Caen	19	5	8	6	23	21	23
Monaco	19	6	5	8	22	23	23
Auxerre	19	5	5	9	14	19	20
Nantes	19	5	5	9	15	25	20
Saint-Etienne	19	6	1	12	15	28	19
Valenciennes	19	3	6	10	16	25	15
Sochaux	19	1	11	7	18	25	14
Le Havre	19	3	3	13	14	34	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS

12 Andre-Pierre Gignac (Toulouse)
11 Fernando Cavenaghi (Bordeaux)
11 Guillaume Hoarau (Paris Saint-Germain)
10 Karim Benzema (Lyon)
9 Michel Bastos (Lille)

FRENCH CUP – last 64

Jan 2: Sainte-Genevieve-des-Bois 0 Lille 3.
Jan 3: AC Ajaccio 1 Auxerre 1 (aet; AC Ajaccio 3-1 on pens); Alencon 2 Lorient 2 (aet; Lorient 3-2 on pens); Alfortville 0 Le Havre 2; Andrezieux 0 Sedan 2; Arras 1 Nice 3 (aet); Bayonne 0 Vitre 2; Bordeaux 0 Saint-Etienne 1; Brest 2 Croix-de-Savoie 2 (aet; Brest 5-4 on pens); Grande-Synthe 1 Calais 1 (aet; Grande-Synthe 4-2 on pens); Jeanne d'Arc 1 Tours 7; Louhans-Cuiseaux 0 Troyes 1 (aet); Montpellier 0 Dunkerque 1; Nantes 2 Caen 2 (aet; Caen 5-3 on pens); Niort 1 Boulogne-sur-Mer 2 (aet); Port-La-Nouvelle 0 Rodez 3; Raon-l'Etape 0 Grenoble 0 (aet; Grenoble 4-3 on pens); Romorantin 0 Nancy 0 (aet; Romorantin 4-2 on pens); Saint-Omer 1 Guingamp 3; Schirrhein 4 Clermont Foot 2; Sochaux 0 Rennes 1; Toulouse 0 Valenciennes 0 (aet; Toulouse 5-4 on pens); Vannes OC 1 Chateauroux 0; Yzeure 0 Le Mans 0 (aet; Le Mans 5-4 on pens).
Jan 4: Besancon 1 Marseille 1 (aet; Marseille 5-4 on pens); Blagnac 0 Monaco 1; Eclaron 0 Dijon 5; Evry Essonne 0 Creteil 5; Montlucon 0 Paris Saint-Germain 1; Villefranche/Saone 2 Orly 1.

Still to play: Concarneau v Lyon (Jan 24); Pont-de-Roide v GFCO Ajaccio (Jan 10)

GERMANY

Friday, December 5

Bayern Munich 2 (Lahm 60, Toni 90)
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Ibisevic 49) Att: 69,000

Saturday, December 6

Arminia Bielefeld 0
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 25,400

Eintracht Frankfurt 4 (Limberopoulos pen 7, 43, Steinhofer 62, Russ 64)
Bochum 0 Att: 39,400

Energie Cottbus 0
Stuttgart 3 (Hilbert 4, Simak 63, Khedira 68) Att: 13,527

Karlsruhe 1 (Buck 83)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 29,373

Monchengladbach 1 (Jantschke 61)
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Kiessling 25, 37, Helmes 54) Att: 44,161

Schalke 1 (Asamoah 65)
Hertha Berlin 0 Att: 60,999

Sunday, December 7

Koln 1 (Novakovic 83)
Hamburg 2 (Petric 15, 31) Att: 50,000

Wolfsburg 2 (Zaccardo 32, Misimovic 63)
Hannover 1 (Stajner 59) Att: 27,560

Friday, December 12

Borussia Dortmund 2 (Zidan 35, Nuri 56)
Monchengladbach 1 (Van den Bergh 80) Att: 79,700

Saturday, December 13

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Rolfes 78)
Energie Cottbus 1 (Shao 90) Att: 19,200

Bochum 1 (Dabrowski 58)
Koln 2 (McKenna 44, Ishiaku 88) Att: 30,208

Hamburg 1 (Petric 59)
Eintracht Frankfurt 0 Att: 55,274

Hannover 1 (Stajner 32)
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Wichniarek 59) Att: 36,672

Hertha Berlin 4 (Nicu 8, Domovchiyski 74, Lustenberger 86, Raffael 88)
Karlsruhe 0 Att: 38,421

Stuttgart 2 (Khedira 45, 90)
Bayern Munich 2 (Borowski 48, Toni 66) Att: 55,896

Werder Bremen 2 (Mertesacker 27, Josue og 63)
Wolfsburg 1 (Gentner 3) Att: 40,008

Sunday, December 14

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Teber 72)
Schalke 1 (Asamoah 40) Att: 26,300

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hoffenheim	17	11	2	4	42	23	35
Bayern	17	10	5	2	39	24	35
Hertha Berlin	17	10	3	4	27	20	33
Hamburg	17	10	3	4	26	24	33
B Leverkusen	17	10	2	5	36	21	32
B Dortmund	17	7	8	2	27	19	29
Schalke	17	7	6	4	24	16	27
Werder	17	7	5	5	39	28	26
Wolfsburg	17	7	5	5	35	25	26
Stuttgart	17	7	4	6	26	23	25
Koln	17	7	1	9	19	25	22
E Frankfurt	17	5	4	8	23	29	19
Hannover	17	4	5	8	20	32	17
A Bielefeld	17	2	8	7	15	27	14
Karlsruhe	17	4	1	12	15	32	13
E Cottbus	17	3	4	10	12	29	13
Bochum	17	1	8	8	19	30	11
M'gladbach	17	3	2	12	18	35	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS

18 Vedad Ibisevic (1899 Hoffenheim)
12 Patrick Helmes (Bayer Leverkusen)
11 Grafite (Wolfsburg)

GREECE

Dec 6: OFI 0 Aris 1; Panserraikos 0 Ergotelis 2; Xanthi 1 Panathinaikos 2.
Dec 7: Panionios 1 Larisa 1; Iraklis 1 Thrasyvoulos 1; PAOK 1 Asteras 1; Olympiakos 1 Levadiakos 0; AEK 1 Panthrakikos 0.
Dec 13: Larisa 1 Olympiakos 1; PAOK 1 Xanthi 0; Asteras 1 Iraklis 2.
Dec 14: Levadiakos 2 Panthrakikos 0; Thrasyvoulos 1 Panionios 3; Panathinaikos 3 Panserraikos 0; Ergotelis 1 OFI 3; Aris 1 AEK 1.
Dec 20: Panserraikos 1 PAOK 1; Iraklis 1 Xanthi 0; Panionios 3 Asteras 0.
Dec 21: Panthrakikos 0 Aris 0; Larisa 2 Levadiakos 1; AEK 3 Ergotelis 2; OFI 0 Panathinaikos 3; Olympiakos 2 Thrasyvoulos 1.
Jan 3: Asteras 0 Olympiakos 1; Ergotelis 0 Panthrakikos 1; Xanthi 0 Panionios 0.
Jan 4: Levadiakos 2 Aris 0; PAOK 2 OFI 0; Panathinaikos 0 AEK 0; Thrasyvoulos 0 Larisa 0.
Jan 7: Panserraikos 0 Iraklis 0.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	16	12	3	1	28	6	39
PAOK	16	9	6	1	19	8	33
Panathinaikos	16	8	6	2	27	12	30
AEK	16	5	10	1	19	16	25
Aris	16	6	5	5	14	14	23
Larisa	16	5	7	4	20	15	22
Xanthi	16	5	7	4	10	8	22
Panionios	16	6	4	6	21	20	22
Panthrakikos	16	6	4	6	10	13	22
Iraklis	16	4	7	5	12	15	19
Levadiakos	16	5	4	7	11	14	19
Ergotelis	16	5	4	7	20	24	19
Asteras	16	2	8	6	13	18	14
OFI	16	2	5	9	15	28	11
Panserraikos	16	2	5	9	9	23	11
Thrasyvoulos	16	2	3	11	13	27	9

EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES

STANDINGS ON JANUARY 4

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Marc Janko	Salzburg (Aut)	30	1.5	45
2	Vedad Ibisevic	1899 Hoffenheim (Ger)	18	2	36
3	Samuel Eto'o	Barcelona (Spa)	15	2	30
	Vagner Love	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	20	1.5	30
5	Stefan Maierhofer	Rapid Wien (Aut)	19	1.5	28.5
6	Nicolas Anelka	Chelsea (Eng)	14	2	28
7	Kris Boyd	Rangers (Sco)	18	1.5	27
8	David Villa	Valencia (Spa)	13	2	26
9	Marco Di Vaio	Bologna (Ita)	12	2	24
	Andre-Pierre Gignac	Toulouse (Fra)	12	2	24
	Alberto Gilardino	Fiorentina (Ita)	12	2	24
	Patrick Helmes	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)	12	2	24
	Diego Milito	Genoa (Ita)	12	2	24
	Daniel Nannskog	Stabaek (Nor)	16	1.5	24
15	Ingemar Teever	Nomme Kalju (Est)	23	1	23
16	Mounir El Hamdaoui	AZ Alkmaar (Hol)	15	1.5	22.5
17	Amauri	Juventus (Ita)	11	2	22
	Nikita Andreev	Levadia Tallinn (Est)	22	1	22
	Fernando Cavenaghi	Bordeaux (Fra)	11	2	22
	Diego Forlan	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	11	2	22
	Grafite	Wolfsburg (Ger)	11	2	22
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	11	2	22
	Guillaume Hoarau	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	11	2	22
	Robinho	Manchester City (Eng)	11	2	22

HOLLAND

Saturday, December 6
AZ 2 (Ari 19, El Hamdaoui 85)
Heracles 0 Att: 16,252

PSV 4 (Bakkal 54, 57, Lazovic 61, 69)
Groningen 2 (Berg 31, Lovre 45) Att: 33,000

Roda JC 3 (Yulu-Matondo 32, Janssen 49, Hadouir 56)
Vitesse 0 Att: 14,350

Twente 6 (Slijngard og 22, og 43, Nkufo 31, 38, Arnautovic 79, Hersi 90)
Sparta 2 (Poepon 80, Slot 85) Att: 22,500

Sunday, December 7
Feyenoord 1 (Hofland 79)
De Graafschap 3 (Oost 11, Den Ouden 51, 69) Att: 44,000

NAC 0
Den Haag 4 (Hoogendorp 9, Knopper 69, 80, Soltani 85) Att: 16,569

NEC 1 (Ntibazonkiza 33)
Utrecht 2 (Cziommer 78, Van der Gun 89) Att: 12,250

Volendam 1 (Sheotahul 41)
Ajax 2 (Suarez 44, Vertonghen 64) Att: 6,260

Willem II 1 (Demouge 65)
Heerenveen 3 (Smarason 45, Grindheim 70, Vayrynen 90) Att: 12,700

Friday, December 12
Ajax 3 (Cvitanich 27, Suarez pen 55, Lindgren 64)
NAC 0 Att: 50,541

Saturday, December 13
Den Haag 1 (Soltani 35)
Roda JC 1 (Meeuwis 45) Att: 9,000

Feyenoord 0
AZ 1 (Ari 56) Att: 45,500

Heerenveen 2 (Beerens 13, 23)
De Graafschap 0 Att: 25,400

Willem II 1 (Van Eijden 80)
NEC 2 (Van Beukering 43, Bouaouzan 57) Att: 13,000

Sunday, December 14
Groningen 1 (Lovre 45)
Twente 4 (Arnautovic 17, Elia 21, Stam 68, Nkufo 90) Att: 22,000

Heracles 2 (Wuytens 45, Van den Bergh 51)
Sparta 1 (Falkenburg 28) Att: 8,500

Utrecht 0
Volendam 0 Att: 19,000

Vitesse 1 (Tarvajarvi 65)
PSV 1 (Amrabat 43) Att: 16,927

Friday, December 19
AZ 2 (El Hamdaoui 8, De Zeeuw 90)
Utrecht 0 Att: 16,000

Saturday, December 20
NAC 2 (Kolkka 47, Lurling 48)
Vitesse 0 Att: 16,844

Roda JC 2 (Granqvist og 45, Yulu-Matondo 73)
Groningen 5 (Berg 3, pen 50, 55, pen 60, Ajilore 87) Att: 14,505

Sparta 4 (Falkenburg 51, Slot 57, Poepon 69, Rose 85)
Heerenveen 1 (Sibon 53) Att: 10,436

Sunday, December 21
De Graafschap 0
Ajax 6 (Cvitanich 10, 71, Sulejmani 12, Suarez pen 53, 62, Emanuelson 67) Att: 12,600

NEC 0
Den Haag 0 Att: 12,350

PSV 1 (Afellay 78)
Feyenoord 0 Att: 35,000

Twente 2 (Douglas 34, Nkufo 68)
Willem II 0 Att: 23,000

Volendam 3 (Van Dijk 26, 73, Platje 90+)
Heracles 1 (Schulmeister 90) Att: 5,000

Friday, December 26
Feyenoord 3 (Biseswar 33, Fer 44, 63)
NAC 1 (Amoah 86) Att: 41,500

Saturday, December 27
Heracles 0
De Graafschap 0 Att: 8,500

PSV 0
Twente 0 Att: 34,000

Vitesse 3 (Buttner 7, Kolk 25, Junker 83)
Volendam 1 (Platje 54) Att: 16,637

Willem II 3 (Van Eijden 3, Demouge 22, Swinkels 58)
Sparta 2 (Knol pen 40, Godee 54) Att: 13,000

Sunday, December 28
Ajax 3 (Cvitanich 7, 18, 57)
Den Haag 0 Att: 47,125

AZ 1 (Pelle 75)
NEC 0 Att: 16,525

Groningen 2 (Gonzalo 54, Granqvist 90)
Heerenveen 3 (Pranjic pen 13, Smarason 76, Paulo Henrique 90) Att: 22,311

Utrecht 3 (Van der Gun 22, Cziommer pen 39, Loval 45)
Roda JC 1 (Meeuwis pen 58) Att: 19,500

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	17	13	2	2	37	11	41
Ajax	17	12	2	3	41	17	38
Twente	17	10	4	3	33	16	34
PSV	17	9	3	5	30	17	30
NAC	17	9	2	6	26	25	29
Heerenveen	17	8	5	4	36	37	29
Groningen	17	8	2	7	36	24	26
NEC	17	7	5	5	25	18	26
Utrecht	17	7	4	6	23	21	25
Willem II	17	7	3	7	24	26	24
Heracles	17	5	5	7	17	26	20
Feyenoord	17	5	4	8	30	26	19
Sparta	17	5	3	9	30	41	18
Den Haag	17	4	3	10	19	26	15
Vitesse	17	3	6	8	15	30	15
Roda JC	17	3	5	9	21	34	14
De Graafschap	17	3	4	10	12	34	13
Volendam	17	3	2	12	19	45	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS
15 Mounir El Hamdaoui (AZ)
13 Marcus Berg (Groningen)
13 Frank Demouge (Willem II)
12 Matthew Amoah (NAC)
11 Danijel Pranjic (Heerenveen)
10 Luis Suarez (Ajax)

HUNGARY

HUNGARY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Debrecen	15	10	3	2	33	14	33
Ujpest	15	8	6	1	27	17	30
Vasas	15	9	1	5	27	23	28
Szombathely	15	7	3	5	22	13	24
Nyiregyhaza	15	6	6	3	20	14	24
Zalaegerszeg	15	6	4	5	25	22	22
Kaposvar	15	6	3	6	26	21	21
Kecskemet	15	6	3	6	23	19	21
Fehervar	15	6	3	6	17	19	21
MTK	15	5	4	6	20	22	19
Honved	15	5	4	6	22	25	19
Diosgyor	15	5	4	6	17	26	19
Gyor	15	5	3	7	23	19	18
Paks	15	5	3	7	21	31	18
Siofok	15	2	2	11	9	27	8
Rakospalota	15	2	2	11	19	39	8

ITALY

Saturday, December 6
Chievo 0
Roma 1 (Menez 69) Att: 13,137

Lazio 0
Inter 3 (Samuel 2, Diakite og 45, Ibrahimovic 55) Att: 50,000

Sunday, December 7
Atalanta 3 (Valdes 20, Doni 78, Vieri 88)
Udinese 0 Att: 15,000

Cagliari 1 (Fini 34)
Palermo 0 Att: 25,079

Lecce 1 (Cacia 83)
Juventus 2 (Giovinco 57, Amauri 90) Att: 28,222

Milan 1 (Kaka 65)
Catania 0 Att: 54,314

Napoli 2 (Maggio 61, Denis 72)
Siena 0 Att: 40,140

Reggina 2 (Corradi 39, Barreto 56)
Bologna 2 (Valiani 52, Di Vaio 60) Att: 10,256

Sampdoria 0
Genoa 1 (Milito 50) Att: 35,000

Torino 1 (Rosina pen 76)
Fiorentina 4 (Mutu 3, Gilardino 43, 84, Kuzmanovic 75) Att: 16,000

Saturday, December 13
Bologna 5 (Volpi 48, Di Vaio 55, 62, pen 79, Bernacci pen 68)
Torino 2 (Barone 7, Abate 53) Att: 20,000

Napoli 3 (Hamsik pen 11, Pazienza 42, Denis 65)
Lecce 0 Att: 40,000

Sunday, December 14
Fiorentina 2 (Mutu 56, Gilardino 79)
Catania 0 Att: 24,699

Genoa 1 (Sculli 87)
Atalanta 1 (Floccari 17) Att: 25,000

Inter 4 (Maxwell 3, Stankovic 47, Ibrahimovic 79, 88)
Chievo 2 (Pellissier 51, Bentivoglio 65) Att: 35,247

Juventus 4 (Del Piero pen 16, Chiellini 34, Amauri 41, 69)
Milan 2 (Alexandre Pato 31, Ambrosini 56) Att: 24,862

Palermo 2 (Cassani 30, Simplicio 54)
Siena 0 Att: 18,538

Reggina 0
Sampdoria 2 (Bellucci pen 75, Padalino 81) Att: 12,150

Roma 3 (Totti 39, Perrotta 77, Vucinic 90)
Cagliari 2 (Conti 58, Jeda 69) Att: 30,260

Udinese 3 (Di Natale 8, 54, Quagliarella 14)
Lazio 3 (Zarate 59, Diakite 72, Ledesma 84) Att: 14,356

Saturday, December 20
Lazio 1 (Rocchi 66)
Palermo 0 Att: 30,000

Siena 1 (Kharja 44)
Inter 2 (Maicon 34, 83)

Sunday, December 21
Atalanta 1 (Vieri 47)
Juventus 3 (Del Piero 30, Legrottaglie 38, Amauri 81) Att: 21,814

Cagliari 1 (Acquafresca 1)
Reggina 1 (Brienza pen 61)

Catania 3 (Baiocco 34, Morimoto 40, 56)
Roma 2 (Vucinic 74, Menez 78) Att: 19,401

Chievo 0
Genoa 1 (Olivera 89) Att: 10,143

Lecce 0
Bologna 0 Att: 9,109

Milan 5 (Alexandre Pato 4, 18, Kaka 13, 52, Seedorf 43)
Udinese 1 (Di Natale 17) Att: 52,842

Sampdoria 0
Fiorentina 1 (Montolivo 19) Att: 22,813

Torino 1 (Bianchi 53)
Napoli 0 Att: 16,537

ITALY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	17	13	3	1	31	11	42
Juventus	17	11	3	3	30	13	36
Milan	17	10	3	4	28	18	33
Fiorentina	17	10	2	5	25	14	32
Napoli	17	9	3	5	25	16	30
Genoa	17	8	5	4	24	17	29
Lazio	17	8	3	6	26	22	27
Catania	17	7	4	6	18	20	25
Atalanta	17	7	3	7	21	19	24
Palermo	17	7	2	8	21	21	23
Roma	16	7	2	7	21	23	23
Udinese	17	6	4	7	25	26	22
Cagliari	17	6	3	8	19	21	21
Sampdoria	16	5	4	7	15	18	19
Siena	17	5	4	8	13	18	19
Bologna	17	3	6	8	19	27	15
Torino	17	4	3	10	18	29	15
Lecce	17	2	8	7	14	24	14
Reggina	17	3	4	10	15	33	13
Chievo	17	2	3	12	9	27	9

LEADING GOALSCORERS
12 Marco Di Vaio (Bologna)
12 Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina)
12 Diego Milito (Genoa)
11 Amauri (Juventus)
10 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)

ITALIAN CUP – last 16

Nov 12: Napoli 3 Salernitana 1; Sampdoria 2 Empoli 1; Udinese 0 Reggina 0 (aet; Udinese 8-7 on pens).
Dec 3: Milan 1 Lazio 2.
Dec 17: Fiorentina 0 Torino 1; Roma 2 Bologna 0.

Still to play: Inter v Genoa (Jan 13); Juventus v Catania (Jan 14).

POLAND

Dec 5: LKS 2 Lechia 1; Wisla 3 Odra 1.
Dec 6: Piast 0 Polonia Warsaw 2; Legia 3 Belchatow 0; Gornik 1 Jagiellonia 0; Slask 3 Ruch 1.
Dec 7: Lech 3 Polonia Bytom 0; Arka 2 Cracovia 1.

POLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lech	17	11	3	3	32	11	36
Legia	17	11	3	3	31	10	36
Polonia W	17	10	5	2	25	9	35
Wisla	17	10	3	4	28	13	33
Belchatow	17	10	1	6	22	18	31
Slask	17	8	6	3	26	20	30
Arka	17	6	5	6	16	17	23
Ruch	17	6	4	7	12	17	22
Polonia B	17	6	3	8	21	26	21
Jagiellonia	17	4	6	7	13	19	18
Lechia	17	5	3	9	15	26	18
Odra	17	4	5	8	14	22	17
LKS	17	4	4	9	11	24	16
Piast	17	4	3	10	8	17	15
Cracovia	17	3	5	9	10	21	14
Gornik	17	3	3	11	8	22	12

PORTUGAL

Friday, December 5
Estrela Amadora 1 (Anselmo 6)
Sporting Lisbon 3 (Izmailov 9, Liedson 51, Vukcevic 78)

Saturday, December 6
Academica 2 (Litos 12, Orlando 89)
Pacos Ferreira 1 (William 59)

Nacional 4 (Nene 24, 39, Mateus 84, Cleber 89)
Belenenses 2 (Silas 60, De Faria 83)

Setubal 0
Porto 3 (Bruno Alves 66, Guarin 69, L Gonzalez 80)

Sunday, December 7
Maritimo 0
Benfica 6 (Reyes pen 21, Suazo 43, 86, Luisao 67, Nuno Gomes 88, 90)

Rio Ave 2 (Semedo 41, Livramento 73)
Naval 0

Monday, December 8
Guimaraes 1 (Fajardo 88)
Leixoes 0

Trofense 0
Sporting Braga 0

Wednesday, December 17
Estrela Amadora 2 (Vitor Moreno 28, Vidigal 62)
Porto 4 (Lopez 11, Rodriguez 45, 84, Hulk 63)

Friday, December 19
Naval 0
Guimaraes 0

Saturday, December 20
Sporting Braga 1 (Renteria 75)
Rio Ave 0

Sporting Lisbon 0
Academica 0

Sunday, December 21
Belenenses 3 (Marcelo 57, Wender 68, Gomez 78)
Trofense 2 (Eduardo Souza 23, Valdomiro 45)

Leixoes 1 (Wesley 58)
Estrela Amadora 1 (Celestino pen 79)

Pacos Ferreira 2 (Cristiano 8, Pedrinha 10)
Setubal 0

Porto 0
Maritimo 0

Monday, December 22
Benfica 0
Nacional 0

Friday, January 2
Academica 0
Leixoes 0

Saturday, January 3
Rio Ave 2 (Gaspar 10, Bruno Mendes 45)
Guimaraes 4 (Gregory 14, Luis Filipe 42, Desmarets 61, Roberto 70)

Setubal 0
Sporting Lisbon 2 (Liedson 17, Joao Moutinho 31)

Sunday, January 4
Estrela Amadora 1 (Anselmo 44)
Naval 0

Maritimo 4 (Baba 3, Djalma 57, Paulo Jorge 88, Vitor Junior 90)
Pacos Ferreira 1 (Cristiano 33)

Nacional 2 (Edson Sitta 14, Miguel Fidalgo 79)
Porto 4 (Hulk 51, 90+, Rodriguez 72, L Gonzalez pen 90)

Trofense 2 (Reguila 44, Helder Barbosa 82)
Benfica 0

Monday, January 5
Sporting Braga 2 (Cesar Peixoto 47, Meyong pen 75)
Belenenses 0

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	13	8	3	2	24	11	27
Benfica	13	7	5	1	24	12	26
Sporting L	13	8	2	3	16	7	26
Leixoes	13	7	4	2	17	12	25
S Braga	13	6	5	2	14	5	23
Maritimo	13	6	4	3	17	12	22
Nacional	13	6	3	4	19	16	21
Guimaraes	13	4	5	4	12	13	17
E Amadora	13	4	3	6	10	18	15
Academica	13	3	5	5	7	11	14
Naval	13	3	4	6	11	14	13
P Ferreira	13	3	3	7	15	22	12
Trofense	13	3	2	8	12	18	11
Setubal	13	3	2	8	7	17	11
Rio Ave	13	2	4	7	10	16	10
Belenenses	13	2	4	7	11	22	10

LEADING GOALSCORERS
8 William (Pacos Ferreira)
7 Nene (Nacional)
7 Wesley (Leixoes)
6 Albert Meyong (Sporting Braga)

PORTUGUESE CUP – last 16

Dec 13: Cinfaes 1 Porto 4; Estrela Amadora 1 Olivais e Moscavide 0 (aet); Leixoes 0 Benfica 0 (aet; Leixoes 5-4 on pens); Naval 3 Portimonense 0.
Dec 14: Pacos Ferreira 4 Vizela 1; Setubal 0 Guimaraes 1; Trofense 2 Nacional 4; Valdevez 3 Santa Clara 1.

ROMANIA

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	17	11	2	4	25	13	35
Urziceni	17	11	1	5	28	14	34
Timisoara*	17	10	5	2	32	20	29
CFR	17	8	5	4	24	13	29
Steaua	17	7	8	2	24	13	29
Univ Craiova	17	7	7	3	23	16	28
Rapid	17	8	4	5	22	17	28
Arges	17	8	3	6	24	21	27
Vaslui	17	7	4	6	19	16	25
Otelul	17	6	5	6	22	20	23
Brasov	17	5	8	4	14	13	23
Gloria Bistrita	17	6	3	8	17	17	21
Pandurii	17	5	6	6	17	22	21
Farul	17	5	4	8	14	24	19
Poli Iasi	17	4	4	9	13	25	16
Gaz Metan	17	4	3	10	18	31	15
Otopeni	17	2	3	12	14	31	9
Gloria Buzau	17	0	3	14	6	30	3

**6pts deducted for non-compliance with CAS ruling relating to club identity*

SCOTLAND

Saturday, December 6
Falkirk 1 (Lovell 62)
St Mirren 2 (Hamilton 41, Wyness 73) Att: 4,828

Inverness 1 (Rooney 73)
Dundee United 3 (Daly 51, Conway 64, D Robertson 71) Att: 3,560

Rangers 7 (Miller 11, Boyd 28, pen 52, 62, Lafferty 80, Novo 88, Davis 90)
Hamilton 1 (McArthur 2) Att: 48,282

Sunday, December 7
Hibernian 2 (Rankin 55, Nish 70)
Celtic 0 Att: 14,289

Saturday, December 13
Aberdeen 2 (Miller pen 16, 42)
Falkirk 1 (Lovell 89) Att: 8,909

Celtic 1 (McManus 79)
Hearts 1 (Driver 23) Att: 56,079

Dundee United 2 (Wilkie 50, Feeney 54)
Rangers 2 (Boyd 11, Lafferty 76) Att: 11,362

Hibernian 2 (Riordan 42, Jones 88)
Hamilton 0 Att: 10,437

St Mirren 2 (Dorman 17, Brady 46)
Inverness 0 Att: 3,364

Monday, December 15
Motherwell 0
Kilmarnock 2 (Pascali 35, Russell 77) Att: 3,339

Saturday, December 20
Hamilton 2 (McCarthy 45, 67)
Motherwell 0 Att: 3,527

Hearts 0
Dundee United 0 Att: 16,442

Inverness 0
Aberdeen 3 (Mulgrew 6, McDonald 51, Mackie 56) Att: 5,862

Kilmarnock 0
St Mirren 1 (Dorman 38) Att: 5,183

Rangers 1 (Boyd 61)
Hibernian 0 Att: 49,538

Sunday, December 21
Falkirk 0
Celtic 3 (Samaras 48, Mizuno 90, McDonald 90) Att: 6,543

Saturday, December 27
Aberdeen 1 (Miller 36)
Hearts 0 Att: 18,021

Dundee United 1 (S Robertson 21)
Falkirk 0 Att: 7,972

Hibernian 2 (Shiels pen 36, pen 40)
Kilmarnock 4 (Invincible 5, 47, Russell 12, Hay 76) Att: 12,117

Motherwell 3 (Porter 8, 39, 78)
Inverness 2 (Tokely 44, Rooney 90) Att: 4,521

Rangers 0
Celtic 1 (McDonald 58) Att: 50,403

St Mirren 1 (Dargo 79)
Hamilton 0 Att: 4,794

Saturday, January 3
Celtic 2 (Samaras 12, 58)
Dundee United 2 (Dixon 60, Feeney 77) Att: 59,558

Falkirk 1 (Lovell 41)
Kilmarnock 1 (Fernandez 68) Att: 5,375

Hamilton 2 (Mensing pen 52, Offiong 78)
Aberdeen 0 Att: 4,334

Hearts 0
Hibernian 0 Att: 17,244

St Mirren 0
Motherwell 0 Att: 10,189

Sunday, January 4
Inverness 0
Rangers 3 (Mendes 46, Boyd 81, 87) Att: 7,056

Wednesday, January 7
Motherwell 1 (Porter 11)
Hearts 0 Att: 4,928

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	21	16	3	2	47	20	51
Rangers	21	14	4	3	48	17	46
Dundee Utd	21	9	8	4	30	22	35
Hearts	21	9	5	7	20	22	32
Aberdeen	20	9	3	8	23	21	30
Hibernian	21	7	6	8	26	28	27
Kilmarnock	20	8	2	10	21	26	26
St Mirren	21	7	4	10	16	22	25
Motherwell	21	7	3	11	21	31	24
Hamilton	21	6	2	13	19	36	20
Falkirk	21	4	6	11	22	31	18
Inverness	21	5	2	14	20	37	17

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Kris Boyd (Rangers)
12 Georgios Samaras (Celtic)
8 Chris Porter (Motherwell)
7 Steve Lovell (Falkirk)
7 Kenny Miller (Rangers)

SERBIA

Dec 6: Hajduk 1 Vojvodina 2; Jagodina 1 Red Star 4; Banat 4 OFK 2; Napredak 1 Borac 1; Partizan 1 Rad 1.
Dec 7: Cukaricki 1 Javor 3.
Dec 10: Borac 2 OFK 1; Rad 2 Napredak 0; Vojvodina 0 Partizan 0; Cukaricki 3 Banat 0; Javor 2 Jagodina 1; Red Star 1 Hajduk 2.

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	17	11	4	2	32	8	37
Vojvodina	17	11	1	5	20	10	34
Red Star	17	9	3	5	29	18	30
Javor	17	8	6	3	23	15	30
Hajduk	17	6	5	6	14	14	23
Borac	17	5	8	4	16	17	23
OFK	17	6	3	8	14	26	21
Jagodina	17	6	2	9	15	26	20
Rad	17	3	8	6	12	16	17
Cukaricki	17	4	4	9	14	20	16
Banat	17	4	4	9	12	22	16
Napredak	17	3	4	10	13	22	13

SPAIN

Saturday, December 6
Barcelona 4 (Henry 20, 28, 79, Daniel Alves 46)
Valencia 0 Att: 82,889

Sporting Gijon 2 (Bilic 4, Barral 60)
Atletico Madrid 5 (Aguero 6, 40, Forlan 57, 81, Rodriguez 72) Att: 23,000

Villarreal 3 (Pires 55, Eguren 83, Rossi 85)
Getafe 3 (Granero 9, Gavilan 17, Javi Casquero 30) Att: 20,000

Sunday, December 7
Betis 1 (Emana 52)
Espanyol 1 (Corominas 71) Att: 32,000

Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Lafita 65, Bravo pen 69)
Malaga 0 Att: 15,000

Mallorca 2 (David Navarro 16, Jurado 35)
Recreativo 3 (Ruben 25, Adrian Colunga 43, Javi Fuego 53) Att: 12,000

Numancia 2 (Del Pino 19, Goiria 51)
Almeria 1 (Solari pen 11) Att: 9,000

Osasuna 3 (Dady 18, 57, Nekounam 43)
Valladolid 3 (Goitom 60, Miguel Flano og 65, Ogbeche 85) Att: 15,848

Racing Santander 1 (Colsa 83)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Yeste 50) Att: 22,000

Real Madrid 3 (Raul 18, Higuain 67, Gago 69)
Sevilla 4 (Adriano Correia 3, Ndri 22, Kanoute 39, Renato 84) Att: 68,000

Saturday, December 13
Barcelona 2 (Eto'o 83, Messi 90)
Real Madrid 0 Att: 96,059

Valencia 2 (Raul Albiol 58, Vicente 81)
Espanyol 1 (Martinez 28) Att: 30,000

Sunday, December 14
Almeria 1 (Acasiete 62)
Racing Santander 1 (Garay 33) Att: 9,500

Athletic Bilbao 3 (Llorente pen 6, Iraola 24, David Lopez 31)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 30,000

Atletico Madrid 2 (Rodriguez 22, Aguero 82)
Betis 0 Att: 42,000

Getafe 4 (Contra pen 14, Uche 31, Del Moral 72, Gavilan 86)
Mallorca 1 (Aduritz 34) Att: 9,000

Malaga 2 (Apono pen 86, Baha 90)
Numancia 0 Att: 19,000

Recreativo 1 (Adrian Colunga 84)
Osasuna 0 Att: 14,000

Sevilla 1 (Renato 45)
Villarreal 0 Att: 40,000

Valladolid 3 (Jonathan Sesma 15, Pedro Leon 26, 56)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 14,900

Saturday, December 20
Espanyol 2 (Sergio Sanchez 58, Valdo 90+)
Atletico Madrid 3 (Rodriguez 7, 90, Aguero 81) Att: 11,725

Real Madrid 1 (Higuain 3)
Valencia 0 Att: 70,000

Sunday, December 21
Betis 0
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Javi Martinez 43) Att: 38,000

Deportivo La Coruna 4 (Lopo 9, Sergio pen 20, Bodipo 43, Filipe Luis 90)
Recreativo 1 (Adrian Colunga pen 24) Att: 12,000

Mallorca 0
Sevilla 0 Att: 12,000

Numancia 4 (Barkero 12, Del Pino 85, Aranda 87, Brit 90)
Valladolid 3 (Goitom 34, 76, Vivar Dorado 53) Att: 7,598

Osasuna 5 (Plasil 6, Juanfran 34, Pandiani 42, Nekounam 45, Hector Font 80)
Getafe 2 (Soldado 65, 90) Att: 16,454

Racing Santander 1 (Valera 67)
Malaga 1 (Baha 38) Att: 16,743

Sporting Gijon 1 (Maldonado 28)
Almeria 0 Att: 20,000

Villarreal 1 (Cani 47)
Barcelona 2 (Keita 54, Henry 66) Att: 25,000

Saturday, January 3
Barcelona 3 (Henry 31, Iniesta 75, Toure 90)
Mallorca 1 (Aduritz 15) Att: 60,399

Valencia 3 (Villa pen 34, Silva 39, 69)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Forlan pen 45) Att: 20,000

Sunday, January 4

Almeria 1 (Corona 35)
Betis 0 Att: 11,519

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Iraola 81)
Espanyol 1 (Hurtado 37) Att: 37,000

Getafe 1 (Del Moral 15)
Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Bodipo 6, Sergio pen 80) Att: 9,000

Malaga 1 (Lolo 33)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 25,000

Real Madrid 1 (Robben 31)
Villarreal 0 Att: 79,500

Recreativo 3 (Javi Fuego 17, Camunas 46, Aitor 60)
Numancia 1 (Brit 90) Att: 14,000

Sevilla 1 (Jesus Navas 49)
Osasuna 1 (Pandiani 90) Att: 30,000

Valladolid 0
Racing Santander 1 (Zigic 64)

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	17	14	2	1	51	11	44
Valencia	17	10	3	4	33	21	33
Real Madrid	17	10	2	5	35	26	32
Sevilla	17	9	5	3	24	15	32
At Madrid	17	9	3	5	39	26	30
Dep Coruna	17	9	3	5	22	19	30
Villarreal	17	8	5	4	27	22	29
Malaga	17	7	4	6	25	26	25
Valladolid	17	7	2	8	25	25	23
Getafe	17	5	6	6	24	27	21
R Santander	17	5	6	6	19	22	21
Sporting Gijon	17	7	0	10	24	36	21
Ath Bilbao	17	5	5	7	21	25	20
Almeria	17	5	4	8	17	25	19
Betis	17	5	3	9	21	23	18
Numancia	17	5	2	10	22	36	17
Recreativo	17	4	4	9	14	27	16
Espanyol	17	3	5	9	15	26	14
Mallorca	17	3	5	9	18	32	14
Osasuna	17	2	7	8	17	23	13

LEADING GOALSCORERS

15 Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)
13 David Villa (Valencia)
11 Diego Forlan (Atletico Madrid)
11 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
10 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

SWITZERLAND

Dec 6: Bellinzona 0 Zurich 3.
Dec 7: Grasshopper 0 Young Boys 1; Vaduz 1 Neuchatel Xamax 0.
Dec 13: Sion 0 Neuchatel Xamax 0.
Dec 14: Lucerne 5 Basle 1; Young Boys 3 Bellinzona 0; Zurich 1 Vaduz 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zurich	18	13	3	2	42	16	42
Basle	18	12	2	4	36	21	38
Young Boys	18	9	5	4	37	21	32
Grasshopper	17	7	7	3	27	15	28
Aarau	17	6	6	5	21	22	24
Neuchatel X	18	4	6	8	23	28	18
Sion	17	4	5	8	18	30	17
Bellinzona	17	3	5	9	17	30	14
Vaduz	17	3	5	9	10	32	14
Lucerne	17	3	2	12	16	32	11

TURKEY

Dec 5: Denizlispor 0 Fenerbahce 1.
Dec 6: Antalyaspor 0 Eskisehirspor 0; Gaziantepspor 0 Kayserispor 0; Hacettepe 0 Genclerbirligi 3; Besiktas 1 Ankaraspor 3.
Dec 7: Istanbul BB 0 Sivasspor 3; Konyaspor 0 Bursaspor 0; Trabzonspor 2 Kocaelispor 1; Ankaragucu 0 Galatasaray 3.
Dec 12: Genclerbirligi 1 Galatasaray 3.
Dec 13: Sivasspor 2 Hacettepe 1; Kayserispor 2 Istanbul BB 0; Bursaspor 2 Trabzonspor 1; Besiktas 1 Ankaragucu 0.
Dec 14: Eskisehirspor 0 Konyaspor 0; Kocaelispor 2 Gaziantepspor 5; Ankaraspor 2 Denizlispor 0; Fenerbahce 2 Antalyaspor 0.
Dec 19: Konyaspor 1 Fenerbahce 2.
Dec 20: Istanbul BB 5 Kocaelispor 0; Hacettepe 0 Kayserispor 3; Trabzonspor 2 Eskisehirspor 1.
Dec 21: Antalyaspor 1 Ankaraspor 1; Genclerbirligi 1 Sivasspor 2; Denizlispor 1 Ankaragucu 1; Gaziantepspor 2 Bursaspor 0; Galatasaray 4 Besiktas 2.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sivasspor	16	10	4	2	28	12	34
Trabzonspor	16	10	4	2	24	14	34
Galatasaray	16	10	3	3	38	19	33
Fenerbahce	16	10	2	4	31	18	32
Ankaraspor	16	9	3	4	24	12	30
Besiktas	16	8	4	4	27	18	28
Kayserispor	16	7	6	3	17	7	27
Gaziantepspor	16	7	4	5	23	21	25
Bursaspor	16	6	4	6	21	24	22
Istanbul BB	16	5	4	7	17	21	19
Eskisehirspor	16	4	6	6	19	24	18
Konyaspor	16	4	5	7	15	23	17
Denizlispor	16	4	3	9	22	31	15
Ankaragucu	16	3	6	7	14	23	15
Genclerbirligi	16	3	5	8	18	25	14
Antalyaspor	16	2	7	7	16	24	13
Hacettepe	16	2	3	11	9	26	9
Kocaelispor	16	2	3	11	19	40	9

UKRAINE

Dec 5: Illichivets 3 Dynamo 4.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	17	14	1	2	42	11	43
Metalist	17	11	4	2	29	12	37
Metalurh D	17	10	3	4	23	12	33
Vorskla	17	9	6	2	19	10	33
Shakhtar	17	8	7	2	25	12	31
Metalurh Z	17	7	6	4	17	15	27
Dnipro	17	6	6	5	15	13	24
Zorya	17	5	6	6	18	25	21
Chornomorets	17	6	2	9	18	21	20
Karpaty	17	4	7	6	16	21	19
Kryvbas	17	4	7	6	14	20	19
Arsenal	17	3	5	9	12	21	14
Tavriya	17	3	5	9	19	31	14
Illichivets	17	3	3	11	16	30	12
Lviv	17	3	3	11	11	25	12
Kharkiv	17	0	9	8	10	25	9

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round draw

Anzoategui (Ven) v Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)
El Nacional (Ecu) v Nacional (Par)
Independiente Medellin (Col) v Penarol (Uru)
Palmeiras (Bra) v Real Potosi (Bol)
Sporting Cristal (Per) v Estudiantes (Arg)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) v Mexico's 3rd reps*

1st legs - January 27-29; 2nd legs - February 3-5

Winners enter group stage
**Eight teams are competing for two of the three berths reserved for Mexican sides; San Luis are confirmed qualifiers for the group stage*

Group stage draw & schedule

Group 1

Colo Colo (Chl)
LDU Quito (Ecu)
Sport Recife (Bra)
Palmeiras OR Real Potosi

Feb 17 LDU Quito-Palmeiras/Real Potosi
Feb 18 Colo Colo-Sport Recife
Mar 3 Palmeiras/Real Potosi-Colo Colo
Mar 4 Sport Recife-LDU Quito
Mar 12 Colo Colo-LDU Quito
Apr 7 LDU Quito-Colo Colo
Apr 8 Sport Recife-Palmeiras/Real Potosi
Apr 15 Palmeiras/Real Potosi-Sport Recife
Apr 21 Palmeiras/Real Potosi-LDU Quito
Apr 22 Sport Recife-Colo Colo
Apr 29 Colo Colo-Palmeiras/Real Potosi
Apr 29 LDU Quito-Sport Recife

Group 2

Boca Juniors (Arg)
Deportivo Tachira (Ven)
Guarani (Par)
Anzoategui OR Deportivo Cuenca

Feb 10 Guarani-Dep Tachira
Feb 17 Boca Juniors-Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca
Feb 24 Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca-Guarani
Mar 4 Dep Tachira-Boca Juniors
Mar 11 Dep Tachira-Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca
Mar 18 Guarani-Boca Juniors
Mar 19 Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca-Dep Tachira
Apr 9 Boca Juniors-Guarani
Apr 16 Dep Tachira-Guarani
Apr 22 Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca-Boca Juniors
Apr 30 Boca Juniors-Dep Tachira
Apr 30 Guarani-Anzoategui/Dep Cuenca

Group 3

Nacional (Uru)
River Plate (Arg)
Universidad San Martin Porres (Per)
El Nacional OR Nacional (Par)

Feb 12 Nacional (U)-Univ SMP
Feb 12 River Plate-El Nacional/Nacional (P)
Feb 18 El Nacional/Nacional (P)-Nacional (U)
Mar 5 Univ SMP-River Plate
Mar 12 Univ SMP-El Nacional/Nacional (P)
Mar 19 Nacional (U)-River Plate
Apr 7 El Nacional/Nacional (P)-Univ SMP
Apr 7 River Plate-Nacional (U)
Apr 21 Univ SMP-Nacional (U)
Apr 23 El Nacional/Nacional (P)-River Plate
Apr 30 Nacional (U)-El Nacional/Nacional (P)
Apr 30 River Plate-Univ SMP

Group 4

America (Col)
Defensor Sporting (Uru)
Sao Paulo (Bra)
Independiente Medellin OR Penarol

Feb 10 Defensor-America
Feb 18 Sao Paulo-Indep Medellin/Penarol
Feb 24 Indep Medellin/Penarol-Defensor
Mar 5 America-Sao Paulo
Mar 10 America-Indep Medellin/Penarol
Mar 17 Indep Medellin/Penarol-America
Mar 18 Defensor-Sao Paulo
Apr 9 Sao Paulo-Defensor
Apr 15 Indep Medellin/Penarol-Sao Paulo
Apr 16 America-Defensor
Apr 22 Defensor-Indep Medellin/Penarol
Apr 22 Sao Paulo-America

Group 5

Cruzeiro (Bra)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu)
Universitario (Bol)
Sporting Cristal OR Estudiantes

Feb 12 Universitario-Dep Quito
Feb 19 Cruzeiro-S Cristal/Estudiantes
Feb 25 Dep Quito-Cruzeiro
Feb 26 S Cristal/Estudiantes-Universitario
Mar 4 Universitario-Cruzeiro
Mar 10 Dep Quito-S Cristal/Estudiantes
Mar 18 Cruzeiro-Universitario
Mar 19 S Cristal/Estudiantes-Dep Quito
Apr 8 S Cristal/Estudiantes-Cruzeiro
Apr 14 Dep Quito-Universitario
Apr 23 Cruzeiro-Dep Quito
Apr 23 Universitario-S Cristal/Estudiantes

Group 6

Caracas (Ven)
Everton (Chl)
Lanus (Arg)
Mexico's 2nd representatives

Feb 11 Lanus-Mex 2nd reps
Feb 17 Everton-Caracas
Feb 25 Caracas-Lanus
Feb 25 Mex 2nd reps-Everton
Mar 3 Caracas-Mex 2nd reps
Mar 11 Everton-Lanus
Mar 11 Mex 2nd reps-Caracas
Mar 17 Lanus-Everton
Apr 14 Caracas-Everton
Apr 14 Mex 2nd reps-Lanus
Apr 28 Everton-Mex 2nd reps
Apr 28 Lanus-Caracas

Group 7

Aurora (Bol)
Chico (Col)
Gremio (Bra)
Universidad de Chile OR Mexico's 3rd reps

Feb 10 Aurora-Chico
Feb 25 Gremio-Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps
Mar 4 Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps-Aurora
Mar 11 Chico-Gremio
Mar 18 Chico-Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps
Mar 25 Aurora-Gremio
Apr 7 Gremio-Aurora
Apr 8 Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps-Chico
Apr 15 Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps-Gremio
Apr 16 Chico-Aurora
Apr 29 Aurora-Univ de Chile/Mex 3rd reps
Apr 29 Gremio-Chico

Group 8

Libertad (Par)
San Lorenzo (Arg)
San Luis (Mex)
Universitario (Per)

Feb 11 Libertad-Universitario
Feb 11 San Lorenzo-San Luis
Feb 19 Universitario-San Lorenzo
Feb 26 San Luis-Libertad
Mar 5 Libertad-San Lorenzo
Mar 10 Universitario-San Luis
Mar 18 San Lorenzo-Libertad
Mar 18 San Luis-Universitario
Apr 8 San Luis-San Lorenzo
Apr 9 Universitario-Libertad
Apr 28 Libertad-San Luis
Apr 28 San Lorenzo-Universitario

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, December 5

Banfield 2 (Ferreira 84, Civelli 89)
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Recalde 11, Pavlovich 34)

Velez Sarsfield 0
Lanus 2 (Lagos 8, Sand 58)

Saturday, December 6

Arsenal 1 (Matos 37)
Huracan 0

Racing Club 0
Gimnasia Jujuy 0

River Plate 1 (Abelairas 61)
Godoy Cruz 2 (Encina 6, Caruso 84)

San Martin Tucuman 2 (De Muner 36, Ibanez 78)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Sunday, December 7

Colon Santa Fe 0
Estudiantes 1 (Galvan 44)

Gimnasia La Plata 0
Boca Juniors 0

Rosario Central 2 (Caraglio 5, Gonzalez 13)
Tigre 3 (Luna 30, 41, Lazzaro 81)

San Lorenzo 4 (Barrientos 18, 56, Solari 20, Aguirre 41)
Independiente 1 (Nunez 67)

Wednesday, December 10

Godoy Cruz 2 (Borghello 56, 90)
Estudiantes 1 (Lentini 36)

Friday, December 12

Newell's Old Boys 3 (Formica 57, Bernardello 88, Insaurralde 90)
Racing Club 0

Saturday, December 13

Estudiantes 1 (Boselli 69)
River Plate 1 (Tuzzio 56)

Gimnasia Jujuy 1 (Montenegro 74)
Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Villar 13)

Huracan 3 (De Federico 15, Gonzalez 43, Pastore 49)
Velez Sarsfield 0

Sunday, December 14

Argentinos Juniors 0
San Lorenzo 1 (Bergessio 6)

Boca Juniors 3 (Figueroa 9, 27, Riquelme 13)
Colon Santa Fe 2 (Torres 42, Valdemarin 53)

Godoy Cruz 1 (Aguirre 79)
Rosario Central 0

Independiente 1 (Higuain 11)
Arsenal 2 (Gomez pen 43, 60)

Lanus 1 (Ledesma 84)
San Martin Tucuman 0

Tigre 1 (Morel 39)
Banfield 0

ARGENTINA – OPENING – FINAL*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Lorenzo*	19	12	3	4	34	17	39
Boca Juniors*	19	12	3	4	33	21	39
Tigre*	19	12	3	4	31	19	39
Lanus	19	11	4	4	34	23	37
Newell's	19	8	7	4	26	18	31
Arsenal	19	8	4	7	26	27	28
Estudiantes	19	8	4	7	24	25	28
Gimnasia LP	19	6	9	4	17	15	27
Velez	19	7	5	7	22	27	26
Colon	19	5	8	6	29	25	23
Argentinos Jrs	19	5	8	6	25	26	23
Godoy Cruz	19	6	5	8	25	28	23
Banfield	19	5	8	6	18	21	23
Racing Club	19	5	7	7	19	22	22
Gimnasia J	19	6	3	10	19	31	21
San Martin T	19	5	5	9	15	18	20
Huracan	19	5	5	9	18	29	20
Independiente	19	4	6	9	15	23	18
Rosario	19	4	3	12	20	26	15
River Plate	19	2	8	9	20	29	14

**San Lorenzo, Boca Juniors and Tigre entered championship play-offs because they finished level on points*

Championship play-offs

Dec 17
Tigre 1 (Lazzaro 75)
San Lorenzo 2 (Barrientos 18, Bergessio 20)

Dec 20
San Lorenzo 1 (Solari 60)
Boca Juniors 3 (Viatri 45, Palacio 77, Chavez 90)

Dec 23
Boca Juniors 0
Tigre 1 (Lazzaro 68)

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Tigre	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
San Lorenzo	2	1	0	1	3	4	3

LEADING GOALSCORERS**
15 Jose Sand (Lanus)
13 Martin Morel (Tigre)
11 Esteban Fuertes (Colon Santa Fe)
8 Mauro Boselli (Estudiantes)
8 Alejandro Gomez (Arsenal)
***Regular league games only*

BRAZIL

Dec 7: Fluminense 1 Ipatinga 1; Gremio 2 Atletico Mineiro 0; Goias 0 Sao Paulo 1; Santos 0 Nautico 0; Atletico Paranaense 5 Flamengo 3; Sport Recife 4 Coritiba 3; Vasco da Gama 0 Vitoria 2; Figueirense 3 Internacional 1; Cruzeiro 4 Portuguesa 1; Palmeiras 0 Botafogo 1.

BRAZIL – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sao Paulo	38	21	12	5	66	36	75
Gremio	38	21	9	8	59	35	72
Cruzeiro	38	21	4	13	59	44	67
Palmeiras	38	19	8	11	55	45	65
Flamengo	38	18	10	10	67	48	64
Internacional	38	15	9	14	48	47	54
Botafogo	38	15	8	15	51	44	53
Goias	38	14	11	13	57	47	53
Coritiba	38	14	11	13	55	48	53
Vitoria	38	15	7	16	48	44	52
Sport Recife	38	14	10	14	48	45	52
At Mineiro	38	12	12	14	50	61	48
At Paranaense	38	12	9	17	45	54	45
Fluminense	38	11	12	15	49	48	45
Santos	38	11	12	15	44	53	45
Nautico	38	11	11	16	44	54	44
Figueirense	38	11	11	16	49	73	44
Vasco	38	11	7	20	56	72	40
Portuguesa	38	9	11	18	48	70	38
Ipatinga	38	9	8	21	37	67	35

Relegated: Figueirense, Vasco da Gama, Portuguesa, Ipatinga
Promoted: Corinthians, Santo Andre, Avai, Barueri

CHILE

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 29/30; 2nd legs - Dec 6/8
Cobreloa v Colo Colo
3-3, 2-2 (agg 5-5; Colo Colo on away goals)
Rangers v Palestino
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2; Palestino on away goals)

Final, 1st leg

Dec 14
Palestino 1 (Ibanez 79)
Colo Colo 1 (Barrios 28)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Selman
Sent off: Nunez 24min, Bishara 49min (both Palestino)

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 20
Colo Colo 3 (Barrios 27, Gazale 51, Millar 61)
Palestino 1 (Pavez 37)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Chandia
Sent off: Pineda (Palestino) 74min
Colo Colo 4-2 on agg

COLOMBIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Play-offs

Group A
Dec 7: Indep Medellin 1 La Equidad 0; Tolima 2 At Nacional 1.
Dec 10: Indep Medellin 0 At Nacional 0; La Equidad 3 Tolima 1.
Dec 14: At Nacional 1 La Equidad 4; Tolima 4 Indep Medellin 1.

CLOSING – PLAY-OFFS – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Medellin	6	3	2	1	8	8	11
Tolima	6	3	1	2	11	9	10
La Equidad	6	2	1	3	10	8	7
At Nacional	6	0	4	2	4	8	4

Group B
Dec 6: America 2 At Junior 0; Pereira 3 Dep Cali 1.
Dec 10: At Junior 3 Pereira 0; America 1 Dep Cali 0.
Dec 14: Dep Cali 2 At Junior 1; Pereira 3 America 1.

CLOSING – PLAY-OFFS – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Pereira	6	3	0	3	9	13	9
At Junior	6	2	1	3	9	8	7
Dep Cali	6	2	1	3	8	9	7

Final, 1st leg

Dec 17
Independiente Medellin 0
America 1 (Cortes 63)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Machado

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 21
America 3 (A Ramos 26, J Ramos og 61, Cordoba 90)
Independiente Medellin 1 (Alvarez 17)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ruiz
Sent off: Perez (Independiente) 90min
America 4-1 on agg

ECUADOR

OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS

Dec 7: Barcelona 1 El Nacional 1; Dep Quito 0 Dep Cuenca 1; LDU 4 Macara 3.

OVERALL CHAMP'SHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Quito	10	6	2	2	12	5	23 [3]
LDU	10	5	1	4	15	14	18 [2]
Dep Cuenca	10	4	2	4	10	11	15 [1]
El Nacional	10	3	5	2	10	9	14 [0]
Barcelona	10	2	6	2	10	11	13 [1]
Macara	10	0	4	6	12	19	5 [1]

Bonus points from 1st and 2nd stages shown in brackets

PARAGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 5: Olimpia 2 2 de Mayo 3.
Dec 6: Sportivo Luqueno 0 Pettirossi 3.
Dec 7: Cerro Porteno 2 3 de Febrero 2; Guarani 2 12 de Octubre 0; Libertad 4 Sol de America 1; Tacuary 0 Nacional 0.

PARAGUAY – CLOSING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	22	12	8	2	35	17	44
Guarani	22	12	7	3	36	17	43
Sol America	22	11	3	8	37	30	36
Cerro Porteno	22	9	8	5	32	26	35
Nacional	22	8	8	6	23	22	32
Tacuary	22	9	4	9	23	24	31
Olimpia	22	7	7	8	33	31	28
12 de Octubre	22	8	4	10	27	33	28
3 de Febrero	22	6	6	10	27	31	24
S Luqueno	22	6	6	10	27	38	24
2 de Mayo	22	4	10	8	26	33	22
Pettirossi	22	1	7	14	15	39	10

Relegated: Pettirossi
Promoted: Rubio Nu

PERU

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 7: Juan Aurich 3 Alianza Atletico 0; Melgar 2 Jose Galvez 1; Sport Ancash 2 Atletico Minero 2; Cienciano 2 Coronel Bolognesi 2; Alianza Lima 1 Sporting Cristal 0; Universidad SMP 0 Cesar Vallejo 1; Sport Boys 0 Universitario 0.
Dec 13: Sporting Cristal 2 Sport Boys 0.
Dec 14: Universitario 2 Melgar 2; Jose Galvez 2 Universidad SMP 2; Alianza Atletico 3 Cienciano 0; Cesar Vallejo 0 Juan Aurich 0; Coronel Bolognesi 4 Sport Ancash 4; Atletico Minero 1 Alianza Lima 0.

PERU – CLOSING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ SMP	26	15	6	5	41	20	51
S Cristal	26	14	3	9	36	25	45
Sport Ancash	26	12	7	7	39	29	43
Melgar	26	11	7	8	35	34	40
Cienciano	26	11	6	9	34	30	39
Al Atletico	26	10	8	8	35	26	38
Cesar Vallejo	26	11	5	10	35	32	38
At Minero	26	9	10	7	32	26	37
Jose Galvez	26	10	7	9	42	38	37
Universitario	26	8	10	8	31	32	34
Al Lima	26	11	1	14	35	39	34
Juan Aurich	26	8	5	13	25	34	29
C Bolognesi	26	7	5	14	34	51	26
Sport Boys	26	1	8	17	17	55	11

Relegated: Atletico Minero, Sport Boys*
**Relegation determined by total points gained in opening and closing championships*

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 6: Nacional 3 Cerro 3; Juventud 1 Cerro Largo 1; Liverpool 2 Central Espanol 1.
Dec 7: Bella Vista 0 Danubio 2; Tacuarembo 1 Racing 1; River Plate 1 Penarol 1; Defensor 3 Wanderers 2; Villa Espanola 2 Rampla Juniors 0.
Dec 13: River Plate 3 Bella Vista 1; Cerro Largo 0 Tacuarembo 1; Defensor 2 Rampla Juniors 1; Liverpool 2 Danubio 2; Villa Espanola 1 Wanderers 0.
Dec 14: Racing 2 Juventud 1; Cerro 0 Central Espanol 2; Penarol 0 Nacional 1.
Dec 17: Nacional 0 River Plate 2; Tacuarembo 0 Defensor 1; Villa Espanola 1 Racing 4; Central Espanol 2 Danubio 2.
Dec 18: Juventud 2 Rampla Juniors 0; Bella Vista 1 Liverpool 1; Wanderers 1 Cerro Largo 0; Cerro 1 Penarol 2.

URUGUAY – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Danubio	14	9	2	3	25	14	29
Nacional	14	9	2	3	21	12	29
Racing	14	7	6	1	24	12	27
Defensor	14	8	3	3	22	12	27
Penarol*	14	8	4	2	28	13	25
Liverpool	14	6	6	2	19	14	24
Cerro	14	6	5	3	20	11	23
River Plate	14	5	5	4	16	15	20
C Espanol	14	5	5	4	16	19	20
Tacuarembo	14	4	2	8	12	20	14
Bella Vista	14	4	2	8	12	22	14
Rampla Jrs	14	3	4	7	14	22	13
Villa Espanola	14	3	3	8	11	23	12
Wanderers	14	3	2	9	15	18	11
Cerro Largo	14	1	5	8	11	23	8
Juventud	14	2	2	10	9	25	8

**3pts deducted for incidents during game in previous opening championship*

VENEZUELA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 3: Zulia 2 UA Maracaibo 1; Dep Italia 1 Portuguesa 1.
Dec 7: Estrella Roja 0 Anzoategui 0; Carabobo 3 Estudiantes 1; Dep Tachira 1 Llaneros 1; Minerven 2 Guaros 0; Zamora 2 Zulia 0; UA Maracaibo 2 Aragua 3; Monagas 1 Mineros 0; El Vigia 2 Caracas 2.
Dec 14: Anzoategui 1 Carabobo 0; Estudiantes 1 Dep Tachira 3; Llaneros 2 Minerven 1; Guaros 0 Dep Italia 0; Zulia 1 Estrella Roja 0; Portuguesa 1 UA Maracaibo 1; Aragua 2 Monagas 3; Mineros 1 El Vigia 0; Caracas 2 Zamora 0.
Dec 17: UA Maracaibo 1 Anzoategui 2.

VENEZUELA – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Italia	17	10	6	1	22	11	36
Monagas	17	9	4	4	23	16	31
Caracas	17	9	3	5	29	20	30
Zulia	17	9	3	5	27	21	30
Anzoategui	17	8	5	4	23	15	29
Dep Tachira	17	7	7	3	35	18	28
Zamora	17	8	3	6	22	17	27
Llaneros	17	7	4	6	15	18	25
Aragua	17	7	3	7	22	21	24
Minerven	17	7	2	8	24	24	23
El Vigia	17	5	7	5	21	21	22
Mineros	17	6	3	8	18	24	21
UA Maracaibo	17	6	2	9	22	25	20
Carabobo	17	5	5	7	19	24	20
Estudiantes	17	6	1	10	22	28	19
Estrella Roja	17	3	6	8	15	23	15
Portuguesa	17	3	3	11	15	36	12
Guaros	17	1	7	9	13	25	10

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Cruz Azul (Mex) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
Houston Dynamo (USA) v Atlante (Mex)
Montreal Impact (Can) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
Puerto Rico Islanders (PR) v Marathon (Hnd)

1st legs - February 24-26; 2nd legs - March 3-5

COSTA RICA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Final, 1st leg

Dec 17
Alajuelense 2 (Herrera 38, Oviedo pen 90)
Saprissa 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Nunez (Saprissa) 41min

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 20
Saprissa 3 (Alpizar 12, Alonso 14, Arieta 85)
Alajuelense 0
HT: 2-0
Sent off: Robinson (Saprissa) 57min; Fernandez (Alajuelense) 57min
Saprissa 3-2 on agg

EL SALVADOR

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Final

Dec 21
Chalatenango 3 (Ayala 48, Blanco 63, Ramirez 100)
Isidro Metapan 3 (Portillo pen 47, pen 115, Martinez 65)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 2-2
Isidro Metapan 4-3 on pens

GUATEMALA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Final, 1st leg

Dec 17
Comunicaciones 2 (Fonseca 40, Paes 58)
Municipal 1 (Ramirez 69)
HT: 1-0

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 21
Municipal 1 (Ponciano 22)
Comunicaciones 1 (Fonseca 78)
HT: 1-0
Comunicaciones 3-2 on agg

HONDURAS

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP Final, 1st leg
Dec 7
Marathon 1 (Mejia 58)
Real Espana 0
HT: 0-0

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 13
Real Espana 1 (Evarildo 32)
Marathon 1 (Berrios 90)
HT: 1-0
Marathon 2-1 on agg

MEXICO

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 3/4; 2nd legs - Dec 6/7
Cruz Azul v Atlante
3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Santos v Toluca
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)

Final, 1st leg
Dec 11
Cruz Azul 0
Toluca 2 (Da Silva 14, Ponce 21)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Delgadillo

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 14
Toluca 0
Cruz Azul 2 (Vela 49, Dominguez 77)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-2. **Ref:** Garcia
Sent off: Viades (Cruz Azul; from the bench) 115min
Agg 2-2. Toluca 7-6 on pens

PANAMA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP Final
Nov 30
Arabe Unido 3 (O Rodriguez 30, pen 66, Mendieta Jnr 111)
Tauro 2 (Palma 5, Aguilar 71)
Aet. **HT:** 1-1. **90mins:** 2-2

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Championship pool

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO – CH'SHIP POOL – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SJ Jabloteh	32	23	5	4	63	25	74
W Conn'tion	32	22	6	4	59	21	72
NE Stars	32	14	5	13	46	43	47
Caledonia	32	13	7	12	48	45	46
Joe Public	32	12	6	14	50	42	42
Petrotrin	32	10	9	13	39	53	39

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw
Acad. Ny Antsika (Mad) v Stade Tamponnaise (Reu)
Al Ahly Tripoli (Lby) v AS Police (Ngr)
Al Merreikh (Sud) v ATRACO (Rwa)
ASO Chlef (Alg) v Fello Star (Gui)
Club Africain (Tun) v Sporting Clube (GuB)
DC Motema Pembe (DRC) v Mangasport (Gab)
Djoliba (Mli) v Casa Sport (Sen)
Etoile Filante (BuF) v Heart of Lions (Gha)
FAR Rabat (Mor) v Sporting Clube (CVI)
Ferroviario (Moz) v Kampala City Council (Uga)
Heartland (Nig) v Black Star (Lbr)
Inter Star (Bdi) v Canon Yaounde (Cam)
IZ Khemisset (Mor) v Wallidan (Gam)
Kano Pillars (Nig) v Elect Sport (Chd)
Monomotapa (Zim) v Miembeni (Zan)
Petro Atletico (Ang) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v CARA (Con)
Sierra Leone representatives v AS Douanes (Sen)
SuperSport United (SAf) v Curepipe Starlight (Mts)
Young Africans (Tan) v Etoile d'Or (Com)
Zesco United (Zam) v Mathare United (Ken)

1st legs - Jan 30-Feb 1; 2nd legs - Feb 13-15

Byes to 1st round: Africa Sports (IvC), Ajax Cape Town (SAf), Al Ahly (Egy; holders), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Ittihad (Lby), Asante Kotoko (Gha), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Cotonsport (Cam), Etoile Sahel (Tun), JS Kabylie (Alg), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw
AS Vacoas Phoenix (Mts) v AS Adema (Mad)
Atletico Muculmano (Moz) v Malanti Chiefs (Swa)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v APR (Rwa)
Hay Al Arab (Sud) v Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby)
Mighty Barrolle (Lbr) v SO Armee (IvC)
OC Bukavu Dawa (DRC) v Club 57 Tourbillon (Con)
Prisons (Tan) v Khaleej Surt (Lby)
Red Arrows (Zam) v Mundu (Zan)
Sport Bissau e Benfica (GuB) v ASC Yakaar (Sen)
Tourbillon (Chd) v Vital'o (Bdi)
USM (Gab) v AS-FAN (Ngr)
USO (BuF) v ASC Diaraf (Sen)
Victors (Uga) v CAPS United (Zim)

1st legs - Jan 30-Feb 1; 2nd legs - Feb 13-15

Byes to 1st round: Aigle Royal (Cam), AS Vita Club (DRC), Bayelsa United (Nig), CS Sfaxien (Tun), EGS Gafsa (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Haras Hedood (Egy), Jeunesse Club (IvC), JSM Bejaia (Alg), Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf), MAS Fes (Mor), Ocean Boys (Nig), Recreativo (Ang), Santos (Ang), Satellite (Gui), Stade Malien (Mli), Stade Tunisien (Tun), Union Douala (Cam)

IVORY COAST

IVORY COAST – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Africa Sports	26	15	7	4	41	19	52
ASEC	26	13	12	1	46	17	51
SO Armee	26	12	10	4	31	15	46
USC Bassam	26	11	8	7	31	23	41
Sabe Bouna	26	10	9	7	26	27	39
Jeunesse	26	11	5	10	24	22	38
Stella Adjame	26	9	9	8	28	31	36
Stade Abidjan	26	10	4	12	29	31	34
Denguele	26	9	4	13	38	37	31
Issia Wazi	26	7	10	9	25	25	31
ES Bing'ville	26	7	8	11	20	31	29
ASC Our'ahio	26	8	5	13	22	39	29
S Gagnoa	26	4	7	15	15	43	19
Reveil Daloa	26	3	8	15	19	44	17

SENEGAL

Championship Final
Nov 23
AS Douanes 2 (Diouf 26, Toupane 84)
Casa Sport 1 (Sow 52)
HT: 1-0

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw
Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha) v Armed Forces (Sin)
Single-leg tie (Feb 18). Winners will meet PSMS Medan (Ins) (Feb 25) for group stage place

Al Sharjah (UAE) v Dempo (Ind)
Single-leg tie (Feb 25). Winners enter group stage

Group stage draw
Group A
Al Ahli (UAE)
Al Hilal (Sau)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Saba Battery (Irn)

Group B
Al Gharafa (Qat)
Al Shabab (Sau)
Persepolis (Irn)
Al Sharjah OR Dempo

Group C
Al Ittihad (Sau)
Al Jazira (UAE)
Esteghlal (Irn)
Umm Salal (Qat)

Group D
Al Ettifaq (Sau)
Al Shabab (UAE)
Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Sepahan (Irn)

Group E
Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Newcastle Jets (Aus)
Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)

Group F
Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Seoul (SKo)
Shandong Luneng (Chn)
Sriwijaya (Ins)

Group G
Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
Provincial Electricity Authority OR Singapore Armed Forces OR PSMS Medan

Group H
Central Coast Mariners (Aus)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap)
Pohang Steelers (SKo)
Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Matchdays: Mar 10/11, Mar 17/18, Apr 7/8, Apr 21/22, May 5/6, May 19/20

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Dec 5: Adelaide 6 Wellington 1.
Dec 6: Central Coast 1 Queensland 1; Perth 3 Melbourne 1.
Dec 7: Newcastle 1 Sydney 2.
Dec 13: Wellington 1 Perth 1; Central Coast 2 Sydney 1.
Dec 14: Queensland 2 Newcastle 1.
Dec 19: Wellington 1 Central Coast 0; Newcastle 4 Melbourne 2.
Dec 21: Sydney 1 Perth 4.
Dec 26: Newcastle 1 Central Coast 2; Perth 0 Adelaide 1.
Dec 27: Melbourne 3 Sydney 2.
Dec 28: Queensland 3 Wellington 2.
Dec 31: Central Coast 1 Perth 0.
Jan 2: Melbourne 2 Queensland 1.
Jan 3: Adelaide 2 Sydney 0.
Jan 4: Wellington 3 Newcastle 0.
Jan 6: Melbourne 1 Adelaide 0.

AUSTRALIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melbourne	18	10	2	6	32	24	32
Adelaide	17	9	3	5	27	18	30
Central Coast	18	7	7	4	32	24	28
Queensland	17	7	5	5	25	19	26
Wellington	18	7	4	7	22	27	25
Sydney	18	5	5	8	27	29	20
Perth	18	5	4	9	25	36	19
Newcastle	18	3	6	9	19	32	15

CHINA

CHINA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shandong	30	18	9	3	54	25	63
Shanghai	30	17	10	3	58	29	61
Beijing	30	16	10	4	44	27	58
Tianjin	30	16	9	5	54	29	57
Shaanxi	30	15	7	8	41	29	52
Changchun	30	12	9	9	53	45	45
Guangzhou	30	10	10	10	41	42	40
Qingdao	30	10	9	11	39	36	39
Zhejiang	30	9	12	9	38	32	39
Henan	30	9	9	12	30	31	36
Changsha	30	7	13	10	28	36	34
Shenzhen	30	8	9	13	35	34	33
Chengdu	30	7	11	12	30	37	32
Dalian	30	6	12	12	30	40	30
Liaoning	30	6	9	15	34	47	27
Wuhan*	30	0	0	30	0	90	0

**Wuhan had all games awarded 3-0 against them after withdrawing from the league in protest at the FA's decision to ban one of their players for fighting during a game*

JAPAN

Dec 6: Vissel Kobe 0 Kashiwa Reysol 2; Kyoto Sanga 1 Shimizu S-Pulse 3; Jubilo Iwata 0 Omiya Ardija 1; Albirex Niigata 3 Gamba Osaka 2; Tokyo Verdy 0 Kawasaki Frontale 2; JEF United 4 FC Tokyo 2; Urawa Reds 1 Yokohama F Marinos 6; Oita Trinita 0 Nagoya Grampus 0; Consadole Sapporo 0 Kashima Antlers 1.

JAPAN – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	34	18	9	7	56	30	63
Kawasaki	34	18	6	10	65	42	60
Nagoya	34	17	8	9	48	35	59
Oita	34	16	8	10	33	24	56
Shimizu	34	16	7	11	50	42	55
FC Tokyo	34	16	7	11	50	46	55
Urawa	34	15	8	11	50	42	53
Gamba	34	14	8	12	46	49	50
Yokohama	34	13	9	12	43	32	48
Vissel	34	12	11	11	39	38	47
Kashiwa	34	13	7	14	48	45	46
Omiya	34	12	7	15	36	45	43
Albirex	34	11	9	14	32	46	42
Kyoto	34	11	8	15	37	46	41
JEF	34	10	8	16	36	53	38
Jubilo	34	10	7	17	40	48	37
Tokyo Verdy	34	10	7	17	38	50	37
Consadole	34	4	6	24	36	70	18

Relegated: Tokyo Verdy, Consadole Sapporo
Promoted: Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Montedio Yamagata

SOUTH KOREA

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS Final, 1st leg
Dec 3
Seoul 1 (Adilson 21)
Suwon 1 (Kwak Hee-ju 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 39,011

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 7
Suwon 2 (Edu 11, Song Chong-gug 36)
Seoul 1 (Jung Jo-gook pen 25)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 41,044
Suwon 3-2 on agg

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A
Dec 13: Port Vila Sharks (Van) 0 Auckland City (NZ) 2.

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere (NZ)	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Auckland	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Port Vila	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group B
Dec 13: Hekari Souths (PNG) 1 Ba (Fij) 2.

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koloale (Sol)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Ba	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Hekari Souths	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Remaining matchdays: Feb 14, Mar 7, Mar 28

WORLD CUP QUALIFYING GUIDE

AFRICA

6 finals berths (one of which goes automatically to hosts South Africa)

1st stage

The 10 lowest-ranked countries of the 53 entrants were drawn in five two-leg ties. However, the Central African Republic and Sao Tome e Principe, who had been drawn together, both withdrew. FIFA awarded byes to the two highest-ranked countries of the remaining eight – Swaziland and Seychelles – and reordered the draw. The winners advanced to the 2nd stage.

Djibouti v Somalia* 1-0
Madagascar v Comoros Islands 6-2, 4-0 (agg 10-2)
Sierra Leone v Guinea-Bissau 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)

1st legs - 14/17.10.07; 2nd legs - 17.11.07

**Decided on a single match, in Djibouti, 16.11.07*

2nd stage

The 48 countries** played in 12 round-robin groups, from which the winners and the best eight runners-up*** advanced to the 3rd stage.

***South Africa participated despite having a finals berth guaranteed because the World Cup qualifying campaign doubles as the qualifying campaign for the 2010 African Nations Cup.*
****The runners-up were ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first and third in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Cape Verde Is	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Tanzania	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Mauritius	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Kenya	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Zimbabwe	6	1	3	2	4	6	6
Namibia	6	2	0	4	7	12	6

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benin	6	4	0	2	12	8	12
Angola	6	3	1	2	11	8	10
Uganda	6	3	1	2	8	9	10
Niger	6	1	0	5	5	11	3

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	6	6	0	0	11	1	18
South Africa	6	2	1	3	5	5	7
Sierra Leone	6	2	1	3	4	8	7
Equat Guinea	6	1	0	5	4	10	3

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	4	0	2	11	5	12
Gabon	6	4	0	2	8	3	12
Libya	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
Lesotho	6	0	0	6	2	16	0

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Gambia	6	2	3	1	6	3	9
Senegal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Liberia	6	0	3	3	4	12	3

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	6	3	3	0	10	2	12
Mozambique	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Madagascar	6	1	3	2	2	7	6
Botswana	6	1	2	3	3	8	5

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	4	3	0	1	11	5	9
Rwanda	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Mauritania	4	0	0	4	2	12	0

Ethiopia excluded because of their federation's non-compliance with a FIFA "roadmap"

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Tunisia	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Burundi	6	2	0	4	5	9	6
Seychelles	6	0	0	6	4	17	0

Group 10

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	6	4	0	2	13	8	12
Sudan	6	3	0	3	9	9	9
Congo	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Chad	6	2	0	4	7	11	6

Group 11

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Togo	4	2	0	2	8	3	6
Swaziland	4	1	1	2	2	8	4

Eritrea withdrew

Group 12

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	6	5	0	1	13	2	15
Malawi	6	4	0	2	14	5	12
DR Congo	6	3	0	3	14	6	9
Djibouti	6	0	0	6	2	30	0

3rd stage

The 20 countries have been drawn in five round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals.

Group A

Cameroon
Gabon
Morocco
Togo

28.03.09 Morocco-Gabon
28.03.09 Togo-Cameroon
06.06.09 Cameroon-Morocco
06.06.09 Gabon-Togo
20.06.09 Gabon-Cameroon
20.06.09 Morocco-Togo
05.09.09 Cameroon-Gabon
05.09.09 Togo-Morocco
10.10.09 Cameroon-Togo
10.10.09 Gabon-Morocco
14.11.09 Morocco-Cameroon
14.11.09 Togo-Gabon

Group B

Kenya
Mozambique
Nigeria
Tunisia

28.03.09 Kenya-Tunisia
28.03.09 Mozambique-Nigeria
06.06.09 Nigeria-Kenya
06.06.09 Tunisia-Mozambique
20.06.09 Kenya-Mozambique
20.06.09 Tunisia-Nigeria
05.09.09 Mozambique-Kenya
05.09.09 Nigeria-Tunisia
10.10.09 Nigeria-Mozambique
10.10.09 Tunisia-Kenya
14.11.09 Kenya-Nigeria
14.11.09 Mozambique-Tunisia

Group C

Algeria
Egypt
Rwanda
Zambia

28.03.09 Egypt-Zambia
28.03.09 Rwanda-Algeria
06.06.09 Algeria-Egypt
06.06.09 Zambia-Rwanda
20.06.09 Egypt-Rwanda
20.06.09 Zambia-Algeria
05.09.09 Algeria-Zambia
05.09.09 Rwanda-Egypt
10.10.09 Algeria-Rwanda
10.10.09 Zambia-Egypt
14.11.09 Egypt-Algeria
14.11.09 Rwanda-Zambia

Group D

Benin
Ghana
Mali
Sudan

28.03.09 Ghana-Benin
28.03.09 Sudan-Mali
06.06.09 Benin-Sudan
06.06.09 Mali-Ghana
20.06.09 Mali-Benin
20.06.09 Sudan-Ghana
05.09.09 Benin-Mali
05.09.09 Ghana-Sudan
10.10.09 Benin-Ghana
10.10.09 Mali-Sudan
14.11.09 Ghana-Mali
14.11.09 Sudan-Benin

Group E

Burkina Faso
Guinea
Ivory Coast
Malawi

28.03.09 Burkina Faso-Guinea
28.03.09 Ivory Coast-Malawi
06.06.09 Guinea-Ivory Coast
06.06.09 Malawi-Burkina Faso
20.06.09 Burkina Faso-Ivory Coast
20.06.09 Guinea-Malawi
05.09.09 Ivory Coast-Burkina Faso
05.09.09 Malawi-Guinea
10.10.09 Guinea-Burkina Faso
10.10.09 Malawi-Ivory Coast
14.11.09 Burkina Faso-Malawi
14.11.09 Ivory Coast-Guinea

ASIA

4.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 38 lowest-ranked countries of the 43 entrants were drawn in 19 two-leg ties. The eight lowest-ranked winners entered the 2nd stage; the other 11 winners went straight into the 3rd stage, to which Asia's top five seeds – Australia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Iran – received a bye.

Bahrain v Malaysia 4-1, 0-0 (agg 4-1)
Bangladesh v Tajikistan 1-1, 0-5 (agg 1-6)
*Bhutan v Kuwait
Cambodia v Turkmenistan 0-1, 1-4 (agg 1-5)
China v Myanmar 7-0, 4-0 (agg 11-0)
East Timor v Hong Kong 2-3, 1-8 (agg 3-11)
**Guam v Indonesia
Kyrgyzstan v Jordan 2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2; Jordan 6-5 on pens)
Lebanon v India 4-1, 2-2 (agg 6-3)
Mongolia v North Korea 1-4, 1-5 (agg 2-9)
Oman v Nepal 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Pakistan v Iraq 0-7, 0-0 (agg 0-7)
Palestine v Singapore 0-4, 0-3 (awarded) (agg 0-7)
Sri Lanka v Qatar 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Syria v Afghanistan 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1)
Thailand v Macao 6-1, 7-1 (agg 13-2)
Uzbekistan v Taiwan 9-0, 2-0 (agg 11-0)
Vietnam v United Arab Emirates 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Yemen v Maldives 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)

1st legs - 08-22.10.07; 2nd legs - 15-30.10.07

**Bhutan withdrew; Kuwait were given a bye*
***Guam withdrew; Indonesia were given a bye*

2nd stage

The eight lowest-ranked 1st stage winners were drawn in four two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Hong Kong v Turkmenistan 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Indonesia v Syria 1-4, 0-7 (agg 1-11)
Singapore v Tajikistan 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Yemen v Thailand 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

1st legs - 09/10.11.07; 2nd legs - 18.11.07

3rd stage

The 20 countries played in five round-robin groups. The group winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	6	3	1	2	7	3	10
Qatar	6	3	1	2	5	6	10
Iraq	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
China	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	6	4	1	1	12	3	13
Bahrain	6	3	2	1	7	5	11
Oman	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Thailand	6	0	1	5	5	14	1

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
North Korea	6	3	3	0	4	0	12
Jordan	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Turkmenistan	6	0	1	5	1	12	1

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Uzbekistan	6	5	0	1	15	7	15
Singapore	6	2	0	4	7	13	6
Lebanon	6	0	0	6	3	14	0

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	6	3	3	0	7	2	12
UAE	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Syria	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Kuwait	6	1	1	4	8	12	4

4th stage

The 10 countries are playing in two round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up will qualify for the finals. The two third-placed countries will meet in a two-leg play-off, the winners of which will meet the Oceania section winners in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	3	3	0	0	6	0	9
Japan	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Qatar	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Bahrain	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Uzbekistan	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

06.09.08 Bahrain-Japan 2-3
06.09.08 Qatar-Uzbekistan 3-0
10.09.08 Qatar-Bahrain 1-1
10.09.08 Uzbekistan-Australia..... 0-1
15.10.08 Australia-Qatar 4-0
15.10.08 Japan-Uzbekistan..... 1-1
19.11.08 Bahrain-Australia..... 0-1
19.11.08 Qatar-Japan 0-3
11.02.09 Japan-Australia
11.02.09 Uzbekistan-Bahrain
28.03.09 Japan-Bahrain
28.03.09 Uzbekistan-Qatar
01.04.09 Australia-Uzbekistan
01.04.09 Bahrain-Qatar
06.06.09 Qatar-Australia
06.06.09 Uzbekistan-Japan
10.06.09 Australia-Bahrain
10.06.09 Japan-Qatar
17.06.09 Australia-Japan
17.06.09 Bahrain-Uzbekistan

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Iran	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
North Korea	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Saudi Arabia	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
UAE	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

06.09.08 Saudi Arabia-Iran..... 1-1
06.09.08 UAE-North Korea..... 1-2
10.09.08 North Korea-South Korea..... 1-1
10.09.08 UAE-Saudi Arabia..... 1-2
15.10.08 Iran-North Korea..... 2-1
15.10.08 South Korea-UAE 4-1
19.11.08 Saudi Arabia-South Korea..... 0-2
19.11.08 UAE-Iran..... 1-1
11.02.09 Iran-South Korea
11.02.09 North Korea-Saudi Arabia
28.03.09 Iran-Saudi Arabia
28.03.09 North Korea-UAE
01.04.09 Saudi Arabia-UAE
01.04.09 South Korea-North Korea
06.06.09 North Korea-Iran
06.06.09 UAE-South Korea
10.06.09 Iran-UAE
10.06.09 South Korea-Saudi Arabia
17.06.09 Saudi Arabia-North Korea
17.06.09 South Korea-Iran

CONCACAF

3.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 22 lowest-ranked countries of the 35 entrants were drawn in 11 two-leg ties, however three of the games – Dominican Republic v Puerto Rico, Surinam v Montserrat and US Virgin Islands v Grenada – were then made single-leg ties only, because several of those countries did not have a stadium that met FIFA criteria. The winners advanced to the 2nd stage, to which the 13 highest-ranked countries received a bye.

Aruba v Antigua & Barbuda 0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
Bahamas v British Virgin Islands 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Bahamas on away goals)
Belize v St Kitts & Nevis 3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Bermuda v Cayman Islands 1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
Dominica v Barbados 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
El Salvador v Anguilla 12-0, 4-0 (agg 16-0)
Grenada v US Virgin Islands* 10-0
Montserrat v Surinam* 1-7
Nicaragua v Dutch Antilles 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Puerto Rico v Dominican Republic* 1-0 (aet)
Turks & Caicos Islands v St Lucia 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

1st legs - 03/06.02.08 & 26.03.08; 2nd legs - 26-30.03.08

**Single-leg games - 26.03.08*

2nd stage

The 24 countries were drawn in 12 two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Antigua & Barbuda v Cuba 3-4, 0-4 (agg 3-8)
Belize v Mexico 0-2, 0-7 (agg 0-9)
Grenada v Costa Rica 2-2, 0-3 (agg 2-5)
Guatemala v St Lucia 6-0, 3-1 (agg 9-1)
Haiti v Dutch Antilles 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Honduras v Puerto Rico 4-0, 2-2 (agg 6-2)
Jamaica v Bahamas 7-0, 6-0 (agg 13-0)
Panama v El Salvador 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
St Vincent & The Grenadines v Canada 0-3, 1-4 (agg 1-7)
Surinam v Guyana 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Trinidad & Tobago v Bermuda 1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2)
United States v Barbados 8-0, 1-0 (agg 9-0)

1st legs - 4-17.06.08; 2nd legs - 14-22.06.08

3rd stage

The 12 countries played in three round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Trinidad & Tob	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Guatemala	6	1	2	3	6	7	5
Cuba	6	1	0	5	5	18	3

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Honduras	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Mexico	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Jamaica	6	3	1	2	6	6	10
Canada	6	0	2	4	6	13	2

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	6	0	0	20	3	18
El Salvador	6	3	1	2	11	4	10
Haiti	6	0	3	3	4	13	3
Surinam	6	0	2	4	4	19	2

4th stage

The six countries will play in a single round-robin group. The top three will qualify for the finals. The fourth-placed country will meet the fifth-placed South American country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

11.02.09 Costa Rica-Honduras
11.02.09 El Salvador-Trinidad & Tob
11.02.09 United States-Mexico
28.03.09 El Salvador-United States
28.03.09 Mexico-Costa Rica
28.03.09 Trinidad & Tob-Honduras
01.04.09 Costa Rica-El Salvador
01.04.09 Honduras-Mexico
01.04.09 United States-Trinidad & Tob
03.06.09 Costa Rica-United States
06.06.09 El Salvador-Mexico
06.06.09 Trinidad & Tob-Costa Rica
06.06.09 United States-Honduras
10.06.09 Honduras-El Salvador
10.06.09 Mexico-Trinidad & Tob
12.08.09 Honduras-Costa Rica
12.08.09 Mexico-United States
12.08.09 Trinidad & Tob-El Salvador

EUROPE

13 finals berths

The 53 countries are playing in nine round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals. The best eight runners-up* will be drawn in four two-leg play-off ties, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals.

**The runners-up will be ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first, third, fourth and fifth in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Hungary	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Portugal	4	1	2	1	6	3	5
Albania	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
Sweden	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Malta	4	0	0	4	0	11	0

06.09.08 Albania-Sweden 0-0
06.09.08 Hungary-Denmark 0-0
06.09.08 Malta-Portugal..... 0-4
10.09.08 Albania-Malta 3-0
10.09.08 Portugal-Denmark 2-3
10.09.08 Sweden-Hungary..... 2-1
11.10.08 Denmark-Malta..... 3-0
11.10.08 Hungary-Albania..... 2-0
11.10.08 Sweden-Portugal..... 0-0
15.10.08 Malta-Hungary..... 0-1
15.10.08 Portugal-Albania..... 0-0
11.02.09 Malta-Albania
28.03.09 Albania-Hungary
28.03.09 Malta-Denmark
28.03.09 Portugal-Sweden
01.04.09 Denmark-Albania
01.04.09 Hungary-Malta
06.06.09 Albania-Portugal
06.06.09 Sweden-Denmark
10.06.09 Sweden-Malta
05.09.09 Denmark-Portugal
05.09.09 Hungary-Sweden
09.09.09 Albania-Denmark
09.09.09 Hungary-Portugal
09.09.09 Malta-Sweden
10.10.09 Denmark-Sweden
10.10.09 Portugal-Hungary
14.10.09 Denmark-Hungary
14.10.09 Portugal-Malta
14.10.09 Sweden-Albania

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	4	3	0	1	9	2	9
Israel	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Switzerland	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Latvia	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Luxembourg	4	1	1	2	3	7	4
Moldova	4	0	1	3	2	7	1

06.09.08 Israel-Switzerland..... 2-2
06.09.08 Luxembourg-Greece 0-3
06.09.08 Moldova-Latvia 1-2
10.09.08 Latvia-Greece 0-2
10.09.08 Moldova-Israel 1-2
10.09.08 Switzerland-Luxembourg 1-2
11.10.08 Greece-Moldova..... 3-0
11.10.08 Luxembourg-Israel..... 1-3
11.10.08 Switzerland-Latvia..... 2-1
15.10.08 Greece-Switzerland 1-2
15.10.08 Latvia-Israel..... 1-1
15.10.08 Luxembourg-Moldova..... 0-0
28.03.09 Israel-Greece
28.03.09 Luxembourg-Latvia
28.03.09 Moldova-Switzerland
01.04.09 Greece-Israel
01.04.09 Latvia-Luxembourg
01.04.09 Switzerland-Moldova
05.09.09 Israel-Latvia
05.09.09 Moldova-Luxembourg
05.09.09 Switzerland-Greece
09.09.09 Israel-Luxembourg
09.09.09 Latvia-Switzerland
09.09.09 Moldova-Greece
10.10.09 Greece-Latvia
10.10.09 Israel-Moldova
10.10.09 Luxembourg-Switzerland
14.10.09 Greece-Luxembourg
14.10.09 Latvia-Moldova
14.10.09 Switzerland-Israel

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Czech Rep	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Poland	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
N Ireland	4	1	1	2	5	4	4
San Marino	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

06.09.08 Poland-Slovenia..... 1-1
06.09.08 Slovakia-Northern Ireland..... 2-1
10.09.08 Northern Ireland-Czech Rep 0-0
10.09.08 San Marino-Poland 0-2
10.09.08 Slovenia-Slovakia 2-1
11.10.08 Poland-Czech Rep..... 2-1
11.10.08 San Marino-Slovakia..... 1-3
11.10.08 Slovenia-Northern Ireland..... 2-0
15.10.08 Czech Rep-Slovenia..... 1-0
15.10.08 Northern Ireland-San Marino... 4-0
15.10.08 Slovakia-Poland..... 2-1
19.11.08 San Marino-Czech Rep 0-3
11.02.09 San Marino-Northern Ireland
28.03.09 Northern Ireland-Poland
28.03.09 Slovenia-Czech Rep
01.04.09 Czech Rep-Slovakia
01.04.09 Northern Ireland-Slovenia
01.04.09 Poland-San Marino
06.06.09 Slovakia-San Marino
12.08.09 Slovenia-San Marino
05.09.09 Poland-Northern Ireland
05.09.09 Slovakia-Czech Rep
09.09.09 Czech Rep-San Marino
09.09.09 Northern Ireland-Slovakia
09.09.09 Slovenia-Poland
10.10.09 Czech Rep-Poland
10.10.09 Slovakia-Slovenia
14.10.09 Czech Rep-Northern Ireland
14.10.09 Poland-Slovakia
14.10.09 San Marino-Slovenia

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	3	1	0	12	4	10
Russia	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Wales	4	2	0	2	4	3	6
Finland	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Azerbaijan	3	0	1	2	0	2	1
Liechtenstein	3	0	1	2	0	8	1

06.09.08 Liechtenstein-Germany 0-6
06.09.08 Wales-Azerbaijan..... 1-0
10.09.08 Azerbaijan-Liechtenstein..... 0-0
10.09.08 Finland-Germany 3-3
10.09.08 Russia-Wales 2-1
11.10.08 Finland-Azerbaijan..... 1-0
11.10.08 Germany-Russia 2-1
11.10.08 Wales-Liechtenstein 2-0
15.10.08 Germany-Wales 1-0
15.10.08 Russia-Finland..... 3-0
28.03.09 Germany-Liechtenstein
28.03.09 Russia-Azerbaijan
28.03.09 Wales-Finland
01.04.09 Liechtenstein-Russia
01.04.09 Wales-Germany
06.06.09 Azerbaijan-Wales
06.06.09 Finland-Liechtenstein
10.06.09 Finland-Russia
12.08.09 Azerbaijan-Germany
05.09.09 Azerbaijan-Finland
05.09.09 Russia-Liechtenstein
09.09.09 Germany-Azerbaijan
09.09.09 Liechtenstein-Finland
09.09.09 Wales-Russia
10.10.09 Finland-Wales
10.10.09 Liechtenstein-Azerbaijan
10.10.09 Russia-Germany
14.10.09 Azerbaijan-Russia
14.10.09 Germany-Finland
14.10.09 Liechtenstein-Wales

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	4	4	0	0	10	1	12
Turkey	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Belgium	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Bosnia-Herz	4	2	0	2	12	4	6
Estonia	4	0	1	3	2	13	1
Armenia	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

06.09.08 Armenia-Turkey 0-2
06.09.08 Belgium-Estonia 3-2
06.09.08 Spain-Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0
10.09.08 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Estonia ... 7-0
10.09.08 Spain-Armenia 4-0
10.09.08 Turkey-Belgium 1-1
11.10.08 Belgium-Armenia 2-0
11.10.08 Estonia-Spain 0-3
11.10.08 Turkey-Bosnia-Herzegovina 2-1
15.10.08 Belgium-Spain 1-2
15.10.08 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Armenia .. 4-1
15.10.08 Estonia-Turkey 0-0
28.03.09 Armenia-Estonia
28.03.09 Belgium-Bosnia-Herzegovina
28.03.09 Spain-Turkey
01.04.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Belgium
01.04.09 Estonia-Armenia
01.04.09 Turkey-Spain
05.09.09 Armenia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
05.09.09 Spain-Belgium
05.09.09 Turkey-Estonia
09.09.09 Armenia-Belgium
09.09.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Turkey
09.09.09 Spain-Estonia
10.10.09 Armenia-Spain
10.10.09 Belgium-Turkey
10.10.09 Estonia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
14.10.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Spain
14.10.09 Estonia-Belgium
14.10.09 Turkey-Armenia

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	4	0	0	14	3	12
Croatia	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Ukraine	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Belarus	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Kazakhstan	4	1	0	3	5	11	3
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

20.08.08 Kazakhstan-Andorra 3-0
06.09.08 Andorra-England 0-2
06.09.08 Croatia-Kazakhstan 3-0
06.09.08 Ukraine-Belarus 1-0
10.09.08 Andorra-Belarus 1-3
10.09.08 Croatia-England 1-4
10.09.08 Kazakhstan-Ukraine 1-3
11.10.08 England-Kazakhstan 5-1
11.10.08 Ukraine-Croatia 0-0
15.10.08 Belarus-England 1-3
15.10.08 Croatia-Andorra 4-0
01.04.09 Andorra-Croatia
01.04.09 England-Ukraine
01.04.09 Kazakhstan-Belarus
06.06.09 Belarus-Andorra
06.06.09 Croatia-Ukraine
06.06.09 Kazakhstan-England
10.06.09 England-Andorra
10.06.09 Ukraine-Kazakhstan
12.08.09 Belarus-Croatia
05.09.09 Croatia-Belarus
05.09.09 Ukraine-Andorra
09.09.09 Andorra-Kazakhstan
09.09.09 Belarus-Ukraine
09.09.09 England-Croatia
10.10.09 Belarus-Kazakhstan
10.10.09 Ukraine-England
14.10.09 Andorra-Ukraine
14.10.09 England-Belarus
14.10.09 Kazakhstan-Croatia

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Lithuania	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
France	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Austria	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Romania	3	1	1	1	3	5	4
Faroe Islands	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

06.09.08 Austria-France 3-1
06.09.08 Romania-Lithuania 0-3
06.09.08 Serbia-Faroe Islands 2-0
10.09.08 Faroe Islands-Romania 0-1
10.09.08 France-Serbia 2-1
10.09.08 Lithuania-Austria 2-0
11.10.08 Faroe Islands-Austria 1-1
11.10.08 Romania-France 2-2
11.10.08 Serbia-Lithuania 3-0
15.10.08 Austria-Serbia 1-3
15.10.08 Lithuania-Faroe Islands 1-0
28.03.09 Lithuania-France
28.03.09 Romania-Serbia
01.04.09 Austria-Romania
01.04.09 France-Lithuania
06.06.09 Lithuania-Romania
06.06.09 Serbia-Austria
10.06.09 Faroe Islands-Serbia
12.08.09 Faroe Islands-France
05.09.09 Austria-Faroe Islands
05.09.09 France-Romania
09.09.09 Faroe Islands-Lithuania
09.09.09 Romania-Austria
09.09.09 Serbia-France
10.10.09 Austria-Lithuania
10.10.09 France-Faroe Islands
10.10.09 Serbia-Romania
14.10.09 France-Austria
14.10.09 Lithuania-Serbia
14.10.09 Romania-Faroe Islands

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
Rep Ireland	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Bulgaria	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Montenegro	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Georgia	4	0	2	2	2	5	2
Cyprus	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

06.09.08 Cyprus-Italy 1-2
06.09.08 Georgia-Rep Ireland 1-2
06.09.08 Montenegro-Bulgaria 2-2
10.09.08 Italy-Georgia 2-0
10.09.08 Montenegro-Rep Ireland 0-0
11.10.08 Bulgaria-Italy 0-0
11.10.08 Georgia-Cyprus 1-1
15.10.08 Georgia-Bulgaria 0-0
15.10.08 Italy-Montenegro 2-1
15.10.08 Rep Ireland-Cyprus 1-0
11.02.09 Rep Ireland-Georgia
28.03.09 Cyprus-Georgia
28.03.09 Montenegro-Italy
28.03.09 Rep Ireland-Bulgaria
01.04.09 Bulgaria-Cyprus
01.04.09 Georgia-Montenegro
01.04.09 Italy-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Bulgaria-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Cyprus-Montenegro
05.09.09 Bulgaria-Montenegro
05.09.09 Cyprus-Rep Ireland
05.09.09 Georgia-Italy
09.09.09 Italy-Bulgaria
09.09.09 Montenegro-Cyprus
10.10.09 Cyprus-Bulgaria
10.10.09 Montenegro-Georgia
10.10.09 Rep Ireland-Italy
14.10.09 Bulgaria-Georgia
14.10.09 Italy-Cyprus
14.10.09 Rep Ireland-Montenegro

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Scotland	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Iceland	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Macedonia	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Norway	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

06.09.08 Macedonia-Scotland 1-0
06.09.08 Norway-Iceland 2-2
10.09.08 Iceland-Scotland 1-2
10.09.08 Macedonia-Holland 1-2
11.10.08 Holland-Iceland 2-0
11.10.08 Scotland-Norway 0-0
15.10.08 Iceland-Macedonia 1-0
15.10.08 Norway-Holland 0-1
28.03.09 Holland-Scotland
01.04.09 Holland-Macedonia
01.04.09 Scotland-Iceland
06.06.09 Iceland-Holland
06.06.09 Macedonia-Norway
10.06.09 Holland-Norway
10.06.09 Macedonia-Iceland
12.08.09 Norway-Scotland
05.09.09 Iceland-Norway
05.09.09 Scotland-Macedonia
09.09.09 Norway-Macedonia
09.09.09 Scotland-Holland

OCEANIA

0.5 finals berths

1st stage

The nine-lowest ranked countries of the 10 entrants* played a preliminary qualifying competition. The countries finishing first, second and third advanced to the 2nd stage, to which New Zealand, Oceania's highest-ranked country, received a bye.

Played in Apia, Samoa

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiji	4	3	1	0	25	1	10
New Caledonia	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Tahiti	4	1	1	2	2	6	4
Cook Islands	4	1	0	3	4	9	3
Tuvalu	4	0	1	3	2	22	1

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Solomon Is	4	4	0	0	21	1	12
Vanuatu	4	3	0	1	23	3	9
Samoa	4	2	0	2	9	8	6
Tonga	4	1	0	3	6	10	3
Amer. Samoa	4	0	0	4	1	38	0

Semi-finals

05.09.07 Solomon Is-New Caledonia 2-3
05.09.07 Fiji-Vanuatu 3-0

Third-place play-off

07.09.07 Solomon Is-Vanuatu 0-2

Final

07.09.07 New Caledonia-Fiji 1-0

**Tuvalu are not members of FIFA and could not enter the World Cup qualifying competition; they participated in the 1st stage tournament because it doubled as the South Pacific Games football competition.*

2nd stage

The four countries played in a single round-robin group. As group winners, New Zealand will meet the fifth-best Asian country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
New Caledonia	6	2	2	2	12	10	8
Fiji	6	2	1	3	8	11	7
Vanuatu	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

SOUTH AMERICA

4.5 finals berths

The 10 countries are playing in a single round-robin group. The top four will qualify for the finals. The fifth-placed country will meet the fourth-placed CONCACAF country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paraguay	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Brazil	10	4	5	1	15	4	17
Argentina	10	4	4	2	13	7	16
Chile	10	5	1	4	14	13	16
Uruguay	10	3	4	3	19	10	13
Ecuador	10	3	3	4	12	17	12
Colombia	10	2	5	3	4	8	11
Venezuela	10	3	1	6	12	18	10
Bolivia	10	2	3	5	13	22	9
Peru	10	1	4	5	5	20	7

13.10.07 Argentina-Chile 2-0
13.10.07 Ecuador-Venezuela 0-1
13.10.07 Peru-Paraguay 0-0
13.10.07 Uruguay-Bolivia 5-0
14.10.07 Colombia-Brazil 0-0
16.10.07 Venezuela-Argentina 0-2
17.10.07 Bolivia-Colombia 0-0
17.10.07 Brazil-Ecuador 5-0
17.10.07 Chile-Peru 2-0
17.10.07 Paraguay-Uruguay 1-0
17.11.07 Argentina-Bolivia 3-0
17.11.07 Colombia-Venezuela 1-0
17.11.07 Paraguay-Ecuador 5-1
18.11.07 Peru-Brazil 1-1
18.11.07 Uruguay-Chile 2-2
20.11.07 Colombia-Argentina 2-1
20.11.07 Venezuela-Bolivia 5-3
21.11.07 Brazil-Uruguay 2-1
21.11.07 Chile-Paraguay 0-3
21.11.07 Ecuador-Peru 5-1
14.06.08 Peru-Colombia 1-1
14.06.08 Uruguay-Venezuela 1-1
15.06.08 Argentina-Ecuador 1-1
15.06.08 Bolivia-Chile 0-2
15.06.08 Paraguay-Brazil 2-0
17.06.08 Uruguay-Peru 6-0
18.06.08 Bolivia-Paraguay 4-2
18.06.08 Brazil-Argentina 0-0
18.06.08 Ecuador-Colombia 0-0
19.06.08 Venezuela-Chile 2-3
06.09.08 Argentina-Paraguay 1-1
06.09.08 Colombia-Uruguay 0-1
06.09.08 Ecuador-Bolivia 3-1
06.09.08 Peru-Venezuela 1-0
07.09.08 Chile-Brazil 0-3
09.09.08 Paraguay-Venezuela 2-0
10.09.08 Brazil-Bolivia 0-0
10.09.08 Chile-Colombia 4-0
10.09.08 Peru-Argentina 1-1
10.09.08 Uruguay-Ecuador 0-0
11.10.08 Argentina-Uruguay 2-1
11.10.08 Bolivia-Peru 3-0
11.10.08 Colombia-Paraguay 0-1
12.10.08 Ecuador-Chile 1-0
12.10.08 Venezuela-Brazil 0-4
14.10.08 Bolivia-Uruguay 2-2
15.10.08 Brazil-Colombia 0-0
15.10.08 Chile-Argentina 1-0
15.10.08 Paraguay-Peru 1-0
15.10.08 Venezuela-Ecuador 3-1
28.03.09 Argentina-Venezuela
28.03.09 Colombia-Bolivia
28.03.09 Ecuador-Brazil
28.03.09 Peru-Chile
28.03.09 Uruguay-Paraguay
01.04.09 Bolivia-Argentina
01.04.09 Brazil-Peru
01.04.09 Chile-Uruguay
01.04.09 Ecuador-Paraguay
01.04.09 Venezuela-Colombia
06.06.09 Argentina-Colombia
06.06.09 Bolivia-Venezuela
06.06.09 Paraguay-Chile
06.06.09 Peru-Ecuador
06.06.09 Uruguay-Brazil
10.06.09 Brazil-Paraguay
10.06.09 Chile-Bolivia
10.06.09 Colombia-Peru
10.06.09 Ecuador-Argentina
10.06.09 Venezuela-Uruguay
05.09.09 Argentina-Brazil
05.09.09 Chile-Venezuela
05.09.09 Colombia-Ecuador
05.09.09 Paraguay-Bolivia
05.09.09 Peru-Uruguay
09.09.09 Bolivia-Ecuador
09.09.09 Brazil-Chile
09.09.09 Paraguay-Argentina
09.09.09 Uruguay-Colombia
09.09.09 Venezuela-Peru
10.10.09 Argentina-Peru
10.10.09 Bolivia-Brazil
10.10.09 Colombia-Chile
10.10.09 Ecuador-Uruguay
10.10.09 Venezuela-Paraguay
14.10.09 Brazil-Venezuela
14.10.09 Chile-Ecuador
14.10.09 Paraguay-Colombia
14.10.09 Peru-Bolivia
14.10.09 Uruguay-Argentina

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"He never played football. So he can never understand what a professional feels on the pitch"

Bologna coach Sinisa Mihajlovic blasts his Internazionale counterpart Jose Mourinho for his unsympathetic treatment of striker Adriano

"With Ronnie we've had to dramatically alter the balance of the team. I'm playing deeper and not so effective in front of goal"
Kaka reveals his disquiet following the arrival at Milan of Ronaldinho

Taking a back seat...Kaka's role has changed since the arrival of Ronaldinho at the San Siro

"When you win at Real, you are simply relieved, as good results are an absolute must here"
In his first interview since his dismissal as Real Madrid coach, Bernd Schuster says he is glad to be out of the pressure cooker

"I come from a little rural community where I was taught not to spend 110 when you only earn 100"
Arsene Wenger tells *France Football* why he is instinctively against splashing the cash in the transfer market

"When you play for Bayern and have the chance to establish yourself, you have to pull out all the stops"
Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge targets the club's unsettled striker Lukas Podolski for his repeated wantaway noises

"The bottle is empty"
After a year without a win, Norway coach Aage Hareide throws in the towel

Not happy...Podolski's moaning has angered the Bayern Munich vice-president

"He made us a promise but didn't keep it"
Flamengo president Marcio Braga loses his cool on hearing that Ronaldo had decided to head for Sao Paulo and sign for Corinthians rather than stay with the Rio de Janeiro club, where he had been working on his fitness for four months after his knee operation

"I don't like alcohol. I must be the only Scot who doesn't drink"
John Collins, the new boss of Belgian side Charleroi, responds cooly when told the town has an Irish pub

"I've always said there are two groups of workers who are paid excessively: stock-market traders and footballers"
Jacques Attali, the former economic advisor to French president Francois Mitterrand, comes up with two scapegoats for the credit crunch

"There's no better spot in the world than here"
Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd announces that his government will give £24million in support of the country's bid to host World Cup 2018

"I do have a high regard for the Hoffenheim model. But the one concern I have for them is the know-it-all ways of [Ralf] Rangnick. The air is thin at the top of the mountain"
Bayern's Uli Hoeness lays into the coach of Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim

"My 20-month-old son Leo walks faster than me these days"
Former Belgium international Mbo Mpenza, 32, announces his retirement because of persistent injury

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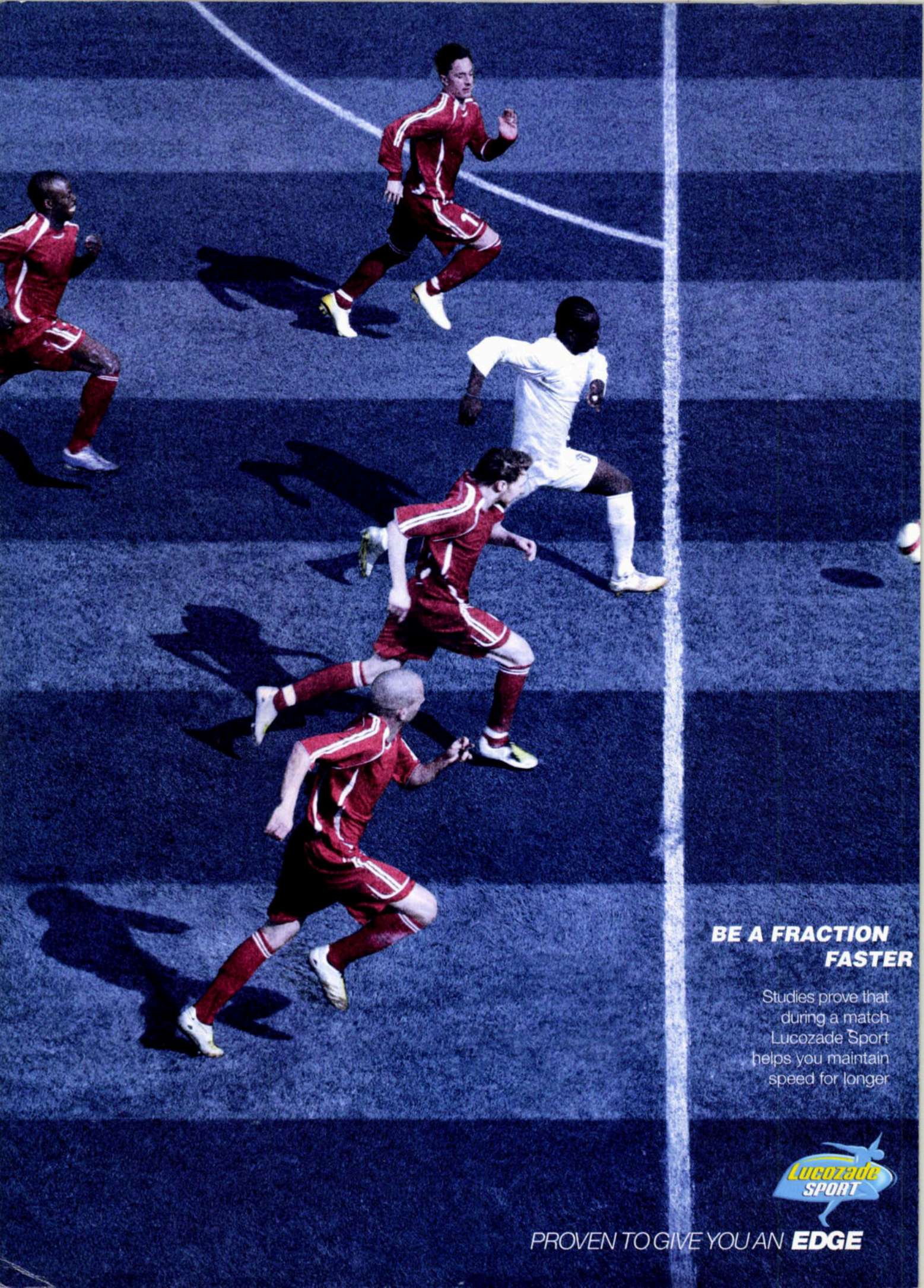
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